ENIKŐ BOLLOBÁS

READING THROUGH THEORY

STUDIES IN THEORY-FRAMED INTERPRETATION
OF THE LITERARY TEXT

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PREFACE

This collection brings together critical studies framed by several theoretical perspectives, including performative, intersubjective, postmodern, feminist, tropological, and rhetorical. In some essays I discuss the theoretical frameworks themselves, delineating the various paradigms and giving historical overviews of how these paradigms evolved, while also demonstrating how they can be applied in literary interpretation. In other studies, I put the literary text into the center, and perform readings informed by particular theories. The prose texts have been selected in such a way that they are best interpreted through these theoretical approaches; specifically, they turn on processes whereby the (gendered) subjects are performatively constructed, while characters, often informed by rhetorical processes and structures, are formed via their interactions with others. That is, performative and rhetorical constructions of the subject and interactions of characters are foregrounded in these narratives; they "stick out" to such an extent that they call for specific theoretical readings. The poetic texts are interpreted within the frames of poetological paradigms that problematize referentiality, self-expressivity, and performativity; among these paradigms, tropization, language-centered approaches, and anti-lyric models are foregrounded in the essays.

This approach of "reading through theory" might be called ekphrastic, with the collection bringing together specimens of "critical ekphrasis," where theory acts as a filter through which we read literature. Theory is put in the service of interpretation, while its use or usefulness is also tested in the process of critical reading. Therefore, we might say that the process is reciprocal, for not only is the text read through theory, but theory is equally read through what is often referred to as the "primary" text. In other words, not only does the text demand the theory, but also the theory demands the text.

The collection starts with the essay "From Logocentric to Discursive: On the Paradigms of Performativity," in which I trace the history of the concept of performativity from its inception in linguistics to its vigorously adopted poststructuralist reconceptualizations. I show that while the Austinian primary paradigm, informed by the modern episteme, exhibits traits of logocentric thinking, the new paradigm, informed by the postmodern episteme, bears the marks of the poststructuralist plea. Moreover, while the performative in the Austinian paradigm conformed to a transitive process with its direct object outside the speech situation,

in the poststructuralist understanding the performative follows a reflexive process, having the subject of the sentence as its direct object. While the Austinian logocentric concept, informed by transitivity, insists on object performativity, the poststructuralist reconceptualization, having replaced transitivity by reflexivity, insists on subject performativity. Finally, while the original concept was a product of linguistics and the philosophy of language, the adoptions reached well beyond the original disciplinary lines. Among the adoptions of the discursive-reflexive paradigm, I focus on subject performativity primarily.

In the next study, entitled "Behavioral Paradigms in the Short Fiction of Henry James: An Intersubjective Approach," I move to the short fiction of Henry James, an ideal ground for character studies, in particular, the investigation of interactional paradigms, from an intersubjective perspective. After providing an overview of the relevant claims of intersubjective theory that I apply in my interpretation, I discuss how some of James' characters interact with the others in modes described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. These characters are defined in terms of how they perceive themselves and the others; they recognize (or do not recognize) other perspectives than their own; they open onto Others, or are touched by Others (or not). Other characters bear gendered marks of language behavior, normative or transgressive styles of speaking.

"The Marking and the Telling—Versions of the Stigma Narrative as Given by Anne Hutchinson, Emily Dickinson, and Philip Roth" is devoted to ways the subject is performed in the text. I first explore how power constructs the female intellect through the body. In the case of Anne Hutchinson, it is two men, John Winthrop and John Cotton, who make discursive gestures that turn a most private female or feminine situation (childbirth) into a public exhibit. Moving on to the example of Emily Dickinson, I examine the foregrounding of the female body in her poetry as well as the contemporary critical response to her poems. In the correspondence between Dickinson and T. W. Higginson, the critic expresses his curiosity for the female poet's age and looks before giving his expert opinion. I read some of Higginson's letters as cases of stigmatization, discursive acts foregrounding the body so as to be able to disregard the mind. Discussing racial stigma, I first examine the 2000 New York exhibit of lynching photographs chronicling the events of physical torture. Here physical stigma is reinforced by social stigma, burned upon the body by the narrative gaze of the prejudiced witnesses. Finally, I show how in Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*, the protagonist passes over from black to Jewish, which can be understood as the ethnically marked version of white. Having, as a man of

colored ancestry, performed Jewishness, he simply replaces one stigma for another, allowing the novel to turn on the performative topos of interlocking stigma and narration.

In "Troping the Unthought: Catachresis in Emily Dickinson's Poetry" I treat catachresis as the trope of performativity in Emily Dickinson's poetry. As one of the poetic devices used by this poet in favor of polytropy, it stands out as the trope that gave Dickinson ample space within language whereby she could play with her "loved Philology" and her "Lexicon," her "only companion," without having to leave the realm of language (Fr713, Fr1715, L261). Through catachresis, Dickinson can access the knowledge that has been accumulated into language; in addition, catachresis enables her to accommodate language's ambiguities and undecidabilities. This trope is responsible for the poet creating connections between signifiers without anchoring signs in the realm of the signified, thus making room for startling innovations and the creation of concepts formerly "unthought." Moreover, catachresis becomes for Dickinson a vehicle for contesting some master concepts that her culture took for granted. Prominent among these is the concept of gender and womanhood, as both the metaphoric re-performance of existing scripts and the catachretic performative resisting and subverting of gender normativity. In her performances of gender Dickinson developed a matching poetics that spilled over into poems on various other subjects, among these, God, death, and psychological states.

"The Fantastic as Performative: Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce Performing the Unreal" is devoted to how alternative realities are created solely by the power of language in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* and Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." The real and the unreal, whether fantastic or imagined, are intertwined and undistinguishable because both are performative constructs. Since the real is as much created as is the fantastic (as in the case of *The Mysterious Stranger*) and the fantastic is as real as the reality of here and now (as in the case of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"), the boundaries between the real and the fantastic are regularly transgressed with ease to and fro, allowing for an ontological instability that makes these late 19th century-early 20th century texts very modern.

In "Tropes of Intersubjectivity: Metalepsis and Rhizome in the Novels of H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)" I explore metalepsis and rhizome as the tropes of intersubjectivity in H. D.'s novels *Asphodel*, *HERmione*, *Palimpsest*, *The Gift*, and *Tribute to Freud*, claiming not only that these texts are about forms of relatedness, but that plot is

generated by the narrativity of the two recurring tropes. In these texts coded by early feminism and early psychoanalysis, the self—through its metaleptic transfers to various rhizomatic planes—is narrativized as multiple, retaining subject positions in diverse alliances. Metalepsis and rhizome will be explored as elements of the rhetoric of an alliance-based self, contributing to the construction of an inclusive subjectivity and of an acentered system of the unconscious.

In "Making the Subject: Performative Genders in Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* and David Hwang's *M. Butterfly*" I set up a binary paradigm informing the two major modes of the performed subject. I use the term *performance* for instances where expressive citationality is dominant in making subjectivities; these processes appeal to existing conventions, invoke existing traditions, and reproduce ruling ideologies. This is the theatrical version of the performative, when existing scripts are being acted out as if on stage, get to be replayed, so to say. In the other case, which I call ontological or radical *performative*, new discursive entities come about against or in the absence of existing conventions. Here, the subjectivities performed will be multiple, unfixed, unstable, mobile, and mutable, allowing for a new possibility of agency. If *performance* was described as expressive, one that reproduces the ruling ideology, the *performative* challenges the ruling ideology. Having set up this paradigm, I discuss two texts of gender performativity: Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* as an instance of the ontological *performative*, where gender is shown to be changing as well as relative, and David Hwang's *M. Butterfly* as an instance of gender *performance*, where normative scripts of womanhood as well as Orientalism are replayed—albeit with a difference.

"Plots of Domination, Plots of Relationality: On the Triangular Positioning of Characters in American and European Literature" deals with three-way structures of desire in literature. This seemingly simple formula reveals unexpected variations and complexities when exposed to theoretical scrutiny. In an attempt to explore their variability and complexity, I place the triangular structures in a wider theoretical and comparative literary context, examining texts disclosing both typical and atypical structures. I study them in an interpretive space framed by theories of patriarchy and theories of intersubjectivity, describing triangular structures of desire found in the works of American and European authors, among them, Henry James, D. H. Lawrence, Stefan Zweig, Sándor Márai, Carson McCullers, and Péter Nádas.

"Versions of Triangular Desire in Hungarian Literature: Reading Sándor Márai and Péter Nádas" continues the topic of the narrative triangle, focusing on two

Hungarian authors in greater detail, Sándor Márai and Péter Nádas, who seem to have one thing in common: their attraction to triangular relationships. Written between 1935 and 1942 and portraying human relations in pre-World War II Hungary, Márai's two novels and one drama all turn on a very specific triangular structure between two close friends and the woman whom they both love(d). Now they conduct a painful *tête-à-tête* to decide on the final ownership (in one case, fate) of the woman. Written in 1979 and portraying human relations in communist Hungary, Nádas's play has only two actors on stage, a woman of aristocratic descent and a young man, the son of a high-ranking communist official, the woman's long dead lover. The intersubjective exchange between the two characters opens into an encounter of three, where the woman and the young man use each other as a mediator to reach the third, the lover/father. I argue that the triangles displayed by the two authors represent two distinct types: the former is informed by fixed, hierarchical, subject-object power relations, while the latter by fluid, non-hierarchical, subject-subject relations.

Framed by feminist theory on the one hand and thematic and rhetorical criticism on the other, "The *Double Entendre* of Sex: Pornographies of Body and Society in Péter Esterházy's Fiction" examines the components of discursive intersubjectivity in two books that share an emphatic attention to sexuality. I interpret Esterházy's discourse of sex as grounded in the figure of the *double entendre,* with a different function in each work. In *Kis magyar pornográfia [A Little Hungarian Pornography],* vulgar corporeality and communist politics are shown as commensurate; each has a double meaning, with sex and politics referring both to themselves and to each other. In using one discourse as a cover for another, Esterházy continues the Central European *Witz* tradition, giving a particular twist to it by making the transference of meaning two-directional, thereby assigning double meanings to sex and politics alike. In *Egy nő [She Loves Me]* sex is not a cover for something else but is shown to be reduced to itself, with a double meaning attached to its internal power relations. Sex is presented as a power game in which man is repulsed by women yet is hopelessly attracted to them. Moreover, sex acts as the only tellable story taking the place of the untellable story of love. Multiple perspectives bring about an interpretational uncertainty on the part of the reader as to whether sexist discourse is legitimized or subverted, and whether this legitimization and/or subversion is carried out by the narrator and/or by the implied author.

The three essays closing the collection belong together, each celebrating a laureate of the Janus Pannonius Grand Prize for Poetry, an international contemporary

poetry prize established by the Hungarian *maestro* poet, Géza Szőcs (1953–2020), President of the Hungarian PEN Club. The prize was named after one of the most highly revered poets of the European Renaissance, the Hungarian Janus Pannonius (1434–1472). "Sometimes called the Nobel Prize for Poetry," as *The New York Times* claims, the Grand Prize has gone to a roster of widely acclaimed poets, among them, the American *enfant terrible* Charles Bernstein (2015), the legendary Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos (2017), and the American *grande dame* of radical innovation, Susan Howe (2020).

"In Imploded Sentences: On Charles Bernstein's Poetic Attentions" explores the work of Charles Bernstein's as a poetry of attention, a poetry attentive to language, a language poetry. This is an innovative-experimental poetry, which at the same time continues some radical poetic and philosophical traditions. Moreover, Bernstein likes to cross boundaries, inviting his readers especially in his philosophical poems to participate in the creative-performative process he calls *"wreading."* Using quotations, near-quotations, textual residues, resonances, and ekphrases, he zigzags between his own texts and those of others; such plurality of linguistic registers brings about a characteristic polyphony and heteroglossia especially in his playful and humorous poems. A poet attentive to the performative processes of consciousness, he captures states of mind with precision especially in his recent lyrical-elegiac pieces.

"Writing on the Margins of Sound and Sight: Augusto de Campos and Transnational Poetic Traditions" explores the work of Augusto de Campos. During a poetic career spanning over six decades, Campos first immersed himself into the more static forms offered by the printed page—ideogram, spatial form, wordplays, permutations, and transformations—, then step by step incorporated the possibilities granted by the new technologies, thus allowing an unprecedented kinetic freedom in his installations, electronic displays, laser holograms, and performances. "Poetry is risk," he famously claims; it is a "journey into the unknown," in which color, sound, and movement work together in the "tongue journey" across languages to create what he calls the "verbivocovisual," a material union of the verbal, sound, sight, and sense. Moreover, the concrete-digital poet who exploits the performative potential of language will produce his own creative self as a subject agent who allows the linguistic material to take the place of the poet's "lyric self."

In the essay closing the volume, "Historical Reconstruction, Rough Book Poetry, and the Withdrawal of the Self: Susan Howe and the Olsonian Tradition," I identify three areas where Susan Howe's innovations tie her to Charles Olson's undervoice

dominating for decades the avant-garde impulse in American poetry. I discuss the following innovations as representative of the most characteristic traits of Howe's poetry. First, her poetry of historical reconstruction informed by an urge to a return to origins, closely related to the historical interest of "going back" to points before things went wrong. Second, her rough book poetry informed by a return to a cognitive state not governed by habitualized patterns of thinking, manifest in a poetic language that disregards the rules of grammar and a page that resists the conventions of normal typography, while also allows the inclusion of nonverbal materials. Third, her dissolution of the self, whereby the "lyrical I" is suppressed, in particular by the reversal of topic-comment relations and the use of discursive filters. The first two areas seem to connect directly to the Olsonian idea of *apocatastasis*, while the third to the tenet of objectism. But while I detect Olson's primary influence in these areas, I also emphasize Howe's innovative reworkings of these tenets, whereby she has departed from Olson's undervoice.

The individual essays appeared originally in journals and anthologies, or were given as conference talks. I am reprinting the texts with kind permissions from the editors and organizers.

FROM LOGOCENTRIC TO DISCURSIVE
On the Paradigms of Performativity

Ideas—like books—have their fates. Some enter the blood vessels of culture right after they are born, others become forgotten forever, still others, after lying dormant for years, are picked up by a new generation and applied adroitly. The concept of performativity belongs to this last group: for decades after it was constructed by linguists and philosophers of language it just sat in a nook of these disciplines until, with the advent of postmodern and poststructuralist thinking, its new paradigm suited the new generation's arguments and became widely celebrated.

In this essay, I will trace the history of the concept from its inception in linguistics to its vigorously adopted poststructuralist reconceptualizations. I will show that while the Austinian primary paradigm, informed by the modern episteme, exhibits traits of logocentric thinking, the new paradigm, informed by the postmodern episteme, bears the marks of poststructuralism. Moreover, while the performative in the Austinian paradigm conformed to a transitive process with its direct object outside the speech situation, in the poststructuralist understanding, the performative follows a reflexive process, having the subject of the sentence as its direct object. While the Austinian logocentric concept, informed by transitivity, insists on object performativity, the poststructuralist reconceptualization, having replaced transitivity by reflexivity, insists on subject performativity. Finally, while the original concept was a product of linguistics and the philosophy of language, the adoptions reached well beyond the original disciplinary lines.

Among the adoptions of the discursive-reflexive paradigm, I will only focus on subject performativity, omitting the discussion of other highly significant applications, among them, intersubjectivity and autobiography.

The primary concept

The first phase of the history of the concept of the performative embraces roughly the period between the 1900s and the 1970s, with its heyday from the early 1950s to the mid-1970s. While it was indeed Oxford analytic philosopher J. L. Austin who introduced and defined the concept, credit must be given to the various anthropological, philosophical, and linguistic precursors he relied on. In this line, Arnold

van Gennep was the first to write about certain "special languages"—such as the language of rituals—where certain harmful words are revered as taboos. Adolf Reinach is next in line: he came up with a theory of "social acts," or acts "performed in the very act of speaking" (36). Marcel Mauss, best known for his theory of the gift, studied "verbal gifts," or the "giving of one's word," from an ethnographic perspective, and decided that such acts as the giving of gifts were "ritual acts," involving agents, actions, social conventions, and common beliefs. Erwin Koschmieder came up with the most extensive theory of speech acts to date, postulating a new "case of coincidence" of utterance and action through examples such as "I hereby bless him" and "I hereby open the meeting," in which "action arises" (26–27). Here action is described as not just coincidental with the utterance, but as having no existence apart from the utterance. Karl Bühler distinguished between three functions of language: representation, expression or intimation, and appeal or arousal, assigning signal function to the last one: through signals, speakers perform actions and make others perform them too. The utterance *"Es regnet,"* for example, has a signal function in that it provokes practical consequences (of taking an umbrella, for example); such "speech actions," Bühler claims, have the goal of steering others to action.

Austin was developing his theory of speech acts from 1939 on, especially in his 1946 conference lecture and article "Other Minds," his Oxford lectures given in the 1940s and 50s on "Words and Deeds," and his William James lectures given at Harvard from 1955, to be published posthumously in 1962. In these lectures, he discussed sentences that can be looked at as performing an act or a ritual, or as entering into a contract or commitment. When performing acts, the speakers of utterances who perform certain acts (make a promise, apologize, pass a sentence, name) are agents, whose actions are capable of bringing about changes in the world. Performatives are defined as non-descriptive utterances, or utterances with the force of actions.

Austin's examples include ceremonial statements such as "I promise," "I do [take this man to be my lawful wedded husband]" (uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony), and "I name this ship the *Queen Elisabeth*" (uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem of a ship). In these performative utterances, saying the sentence does the promising, the marrying, and the christening. To make such statements is not to describe or state, but rather to do something, to perform an act. Performatives are distinguished from constatives in that they are not true or false, but have force: they make the actions come about and establish a certain binding responsibility on the part of the speaker for the action performed. Some requirements

do apply, among them the felicity condition of the seriousness of circumstances and intention, which excludes performance on stage or by actor, which would make the utterance "*in a particular way* hollow or void" (22). Austin highlights the radical shift from serious to non-serious circumstances by appropriating Shakespeare's metaphor in *The Tempest* (Scene ii of Act I): language use in such non-ordinary circumstances go through a "sea-change" and represents a practice "*parasitic* upon its normal use" (22).

Austin developed his theory of three speech acts in the later William James lectures. The three acts he differentiated were the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. He described the locutionary acts as the acts *of* saying something, "roughly equivalent to 'meaning' in the traditional sense" (108); illocutionary acts as those performed *in* saying something, "utterances which have a certain [conventional] force" (108); and perlocutionary acts as acts having certain consequential effects, "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something" (108). This tripartite model assumes that every utterance has an illocutionary force; that is, all speech acts are performative. The concept grew into a paradigm explaining not just individual phenomena but whole patterns in language.

Coinciding with the time of the modern episteme in the humanities and social sciences, this primary paradigm of performativity exhibits several traits of the formalist-structuralist paradigm. Among these traits is the understanding that—with the verb's direct object gaining an existence outside discourse—language proves to be capable of creating something outside itself. Therefore, I will label this primary paradigm *object* or *logocentric performative*. Exhibiting the "power of the word," the performative, in this epistemic framework, was understood as a language structure affecting the "real" outside discourse. Moreover, the presence of an outside (transcendental) authority—or at least a speaker with a particular intention—was assumed to be necessary to validate the act, to make the words bring about things.

Born between the 1950s and '70s, speech act theory took off from the constative-performative dichotomy, taking for granted the binarity of language processes as foregrounded in reference. All along, the binaries, understood as transformations of the signifier/signified dichotomy—such as word and thing, word and deed, saying and doing—remained uncontested.

Let's see some examples now.

The foundational moment of logocentrism, when God creates by the *Logos*, exploits performative power in a rather obvious manner. Tying the signifier to the

signified, the word brings about a presence in the world "out there." Indeed, the narrative of origin related at the very beginning of *Genesis* abounds in instances when words make things, and saying and doing are one: "Let there be light,"[1] "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," or "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1.3, 6, 26). This "Ur-performative" is evoked emphatically at the beginning of the New Testament as well: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God" (1 John 1.1). Commonly referred to as word magic or the power of words, and variably termed acts of "originary performativity" (Derrida, *Specters* 36–37), "linguistic magic" (Fotion 51), or "performative sorcery" (Loxley 51), these are cases with a logocentric performative force, where the word as a vehicle of creation is used to produce some new reality. Man's whole existence rests on the power of God's word: "man lives from every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8.3).

My second example is The Declaration of Independence, one of the greatest political documents of all times, brilliantly exploiting object or logocentric performativity. An expression of Enlightenment logic, it argues along the lines of a simple syllogism: people have the right to throw off despotic governments (major premise); the British King has established absolute tyranny over the colonies (minor premise); therefore, the people of these colonies have the right and do now throw off British rule and declare independence from England (conclusion). It is a text peppered with performatives; as a declaration, it was produced in order to perform certain political-historical acts. To make such statements in appropriate circumstances is to *do* something, to *perform* acts and, not incidentally, to *found* a political body, the free state of the United States. Among the acts performed are the *confirmation* of certain basic values, the *giving* of "facts" (accusing England by *naming*, *labeling*, and *interpreting* their actions), and the *declaring* of separation from England.

My third example concerns the concrete traditions of poetry, which foreground some essential features of the performative: its non-descriptive, non-mimetic, and anti-representational constitution. Born out of a commitment to aesthetic autonomy, the linguistic gesture refusing the word's secondariness to reality, these poetries have also revolted against the transparency of language, against the use of words merely as representations. The concrete poet refuses to be limited to the signifying function of language, a secondary representational dimension, and, borrowing the

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[1]   Quotations are from the *New Geneva Study Bible*.

Logos from the Creator, uses language to make concrete material objects, "things" in the real world. As such, the concrete poem embodies the logocentric performative principle in that it aims to create something outside language. Concrete poetry turns on the identity of word/image and thing, where the language-in-formed-visual-image itself is the "thing" performed. The concrete linguistic-visual is not true or false for corresponding or not corresponding to certain states of affairs: it is the object that serves its own evidence for truth. Paul de Vree's "My Word Is My Sword" (Klonsky 255), for example, turns on this coincidence of the stating and doing by literally creating the image of a sword out of the letter of the words.
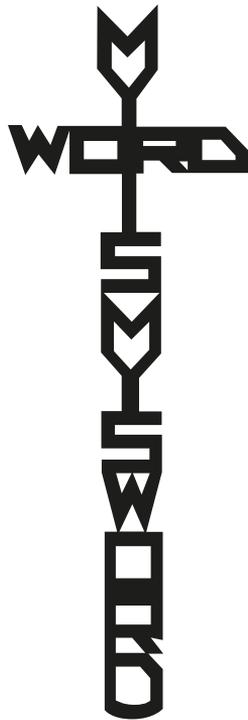
Paul de Vree, "My Word Is My Sword"

In this poem, a new object, a new referent, is created, performatively, out of the letters of the word.

Emmett Williams' "Like Attracts Like" (Klonsky 295) also emphasizes the identity of word and thing. Aspires to be a concrete visual object, the thing itself, not some paraphrase of the textual, the poem performs the action it reports: structure follows, indeed enacts, meaning.

```
like      attracts      like
like      attracts      like
like      attracts     like
like      attracts    like
like     attracts    like
like   attracts  like
like attracts like
likeattractslike
likeattractslike
likeattrackslike
likattradilse
likttralike
littelikts
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Emmett Williams, "Like Attracts Like"

"This particular poem says what it does and does what it says, and I can't think of three other words that would work as well in this construction," Williams writes (Williams, no pagination). The poem is literally built on the logocentric performative principle: saying the word will make it in the world. As the visual object formed out of the letters of *like* slowly moves towards its replica at the end of the line, meaning comes to be enacted visually.

The paradigm change

By the 1970s and 1980s, the logocentric or object performative became severely destabilized, to be replaced by a new understanding of the concept. Two circumstances must be mentioned that contributed to this destabilization: the linguistic turn and the emergence of the postmodern episteme.

The linguistic turn can be defined by the notion that language is not simply the medium of knowledge but the agent of knowing. Richard Rorty, who in his 1967 anthology collected the landmark essays of the new thinking, places the linguistic turn in the 1930s, and, borrowing Austin's metaphor, identifies it as a proper

sea-change in philosophy, whereby the study of language replaced the study of concepts (364).

We need to consider the linguistic turn within the context of a broader, more general paradigm shift, the emergence of the postmodern episteme. It was in the 1970s that the postmodern episteme began to replace the modern, fundamentally transforming the conceptual frameworks of investigations used by scholars in the humanities and the social sciences. The episteme component that directly concerns us here consists in the disappearance of the binary structure of the sign; "reality" and "things" have given way to "mere" discourse: language and words. As Foucault and Derrida famously put it, "one remains within the dimension of discourse" (Foucault, *Archeology* 76); *il n'y a pas de hors-texte* (Derrida, *Grammatology* 158).

Framed by the linguistic turn and the postmodern episteme, the performative has become a generative concept in poststructuralist critical thinking, understood as a non-referential discursive operation, a function of discourse. The performative was picked up by philosophers and theorists in the 1970s and especially 1980s and 1990s. Radical thinkers used performative theory in support of their critique of metaphysics; among these are Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Stanley Fish, Shoshana Felman, and J. Hillis Miller. At the same time, feminist critics put the performative in the middle of their constructionist work on the subject, especially when exploring gender, sexual, and racial identity; among them are Diana Fuss, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. A concept originally devised for a small group of verbs, the performative has now grown into a paradigm proper, interpreting discursive processes, including social production.

The question arises: what is the object of the performative act? If the logocentric understanding of the performative is not adequate, can one say that the performative performs anything? Or, borrowing Joseph N. Riddel's words, is *to perform* really a transitive verb?

It seems that only in the logocentric framework can we give a positive answer to these questions when the "object" is outside the speech situation. From the poststructuralist perspective, the performative can only be considered a discursive function, one limited to the speech situation. As such, the performative will allow the speaker to refer back to discourse, to construct the grammatical subject as social subject or agent. For, as Émile Benveniste claims in his "Subjectivity in Language," published as early as 1959, it is only "in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being" (729). Subjectivity is truly a property

of language: "'[e]go' is he who *says* 'ego'" (729). Moreover, the speaker's performed subjectivity does not precede the performative act; subjectivity comes about exclusively via the (discursive) performative process.

In short, while the verb *to perform* was indeed considered transitive within the logocentric framework, having its object outside the speech situation (in the "world"), this transitivity was severely called into question by the poststructuralist perspective, which limits the act's sphere of operation to discourse. As such, the performative has the speaker (the subject of the performative utterance) as its object, who will be constructed into social subject: linguistic actor becomes social agent. For this reason, I suggest that we consider the verb *to perform: reflexive.* This, I believe, represents yet another "sea-change," this time epistemic, of the primary paradigm, from the modern to the postmodern episteme.

Revisiting now my three examples given as illustrations of the logocentric performative, I would like to approach them from the discursive-reflexive perspective.

When God creates the world, He constitutes himself as the Creating Subject. As the Almighty, he is the Absolute Agent or Subject, whose position, moreover, is fixed in the sentence by Divine Law. This Law forbids man to refer to Him by the name or give his visual representation. When Moses asks his name, he says, "I AM WHO I AM" (Exod. 3.14) (in other translations, "I AM THAT I AM"). And when Moses rephrases his question, asking really for a nominal form to be used in the direct or indirect object position in a sentence, God replies, "Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Exod. 3.14). In other words, there is no way to put God in the object position: his name cannot be referred to with a nominal, only by reiterating his subjecthood or self-existence, "I AM." In other words: God's ego comes about discursively and performatively: by uttering the performative *ego*: "I AM." As an act of self-presence uttered by the ultimate Subject, God's *Logos* conjoins word and world, causing its own truth: creation.

We saw earlier how The Declaration of Independence acts as a logocentric performative: by declaring it, independence is born. Words, indeed, seem to make things here. But we know very well that independence was not simply performed by word magic, rather by hard-won political processes and actual bloody battles. This process raises the issue of agency as well: speakers of such utterances emerge as agents, whose actions are capable of bringing about changes in the world. Indeed, The Declaration of Independence showcases the way the act constitutes the actor: the "We" of the American people. What Benveniste pointed out in connection with subjectivity in general—namely that "the verb establishes the act at the same time

that it sets up the subject" (732)—holds especially true here: the act brings about the actor. Indeed, the paradox of the speech act lies in the fact that the entity declaring itself "American People" did not yet exist when independence was declared in their name. Applying Derrida's interpretation of the relationship between signature and signer, the signers do not exist prior to the signing; rather, "the signature invents the signer" (*Negotiations* 49).

The objects put together by letters in concrete poetry seem to have another message too: to highlight the gap between words/images and things. Concrete poetry creates the illusion of concreteness while problematizing representation. Much like Magritte's "The Treason of Images" (*la Trahison des images*), which explicitly warns the viewer against considering the image as object: "This is not a pipe" (*Ceci n'est pas une pipe*). By the same token, it is not objects that are produced here—not an actual "sword" made out of the letters of the word in de Vree's poem, not the slow-moving action triggered by the words in Williams' piece—but rather subjects: the subjects capable of producing such objects. These performative processes bring about linguistic subjects to whom creative agency is assigned. Indeed, the signature invents the signer here too. So what really happens in concrete poetry is not logo-centric object performativity but discursive-reflexive subject performativity: the making of the maker in its original Greek sense, *ποιητής* (*poiētḗs*).

The performative turn in theories of the subject

The discursive-reflexive understanding of the performative seems to offer a usable paradigm to capture subjectivity, one that is epistemically conducive to poststructuralist (in this case, post-Cartesian) theories of the subject. Butler was most probably the first theorist who explained social construction by applying the discursive paradigm: she first devised a theory of gender performativity, which she later expanded to embrace the performative construction of the subject as a whole. Butler applied the gesture of deconstructive reversal to the sex/gender (or nature/culture) binary, pointing out that sex is not the superior term, a biological given, subordinating the supposedly inferior term of gender, but rather the dominant concept, while sex is a subcategory of gender. Sex is, she claims, "as culturally constructed as gender" (*Gender Trouble* 71); therefore, it is "always already gender" (7), and the body ("nature") "always already a cultural sign" (71). It is to this larger category of gender—the one that includes the always already gendered biological

body—that Butler assigns performativity: "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (25); "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (136). Performativity is a vehicle of discourse whereby ontological effects come about: gender and sex are constructed via the discursive practice which "produce[s] the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (*Bodies* 2); "that enacts or produces that which it names" (13). Butler describes the production of gender and sex as the condition of subjectivation: "the subject, the speaking 'I,' is formed by virtue of having gone through such a process" (3). Gender and sex are, therefore, expressions, with no essential identity preceding this performance.

Applying this thesis to the subject in general, we can claim that the subject itself is constituted by performative acts; as such, it is constructed in discourse, the discourse of the social and the cultural. Here the performative processes bring about subjects as participants of this discourse in a reflexive manner: constructing the speaking subject, the "I" of the sentence, as a social subject.

Two forms of performativity can be differentiated, I would like to suggest, in the production of the subject. The first is characterized by an acceptance of normative ideologies, a citation and expression of existing social scripts and a perpetuation of existing realities. The second form is characterized by subversion of normative ideologies and the attempt to bring about new social scripts and, subsequently, new realities. It is this latter type that allows the possibility of agency in poststructuralist thinking: when the person formerly constructed as object/patient by dominant ideologies now resists power, subverts this ideology, and applies performative processes that will permit subjectivization. This is the gesture of subversion Foucault calls *assujettissement*; this is the performative defiance Butler calls *critique.* Foucault claims that *assujettissement*, or subjectivation, derives from the subject's resistance to the various exercises of power, and can take different forms: insanity, antiauthority struggles, and various "immediate" struggles, which all "assert the right to be different" ("The Subject" 211). What "makes individuals truly individuals" (211) is their "voluntary insubordination" (Foucault, "What Is Critique?" 47) to power. Ethical-critical resistance to what Foucault calls "the capillary functioning of power" (*Discipline* 198) or the disciplines of control and the mechanics of power (138) will allow formerly "docile bodies" (135), defined by domination, to become subjects in the sense of *assujettissement.* Butler identifies critique along these Foucauldian lines, defining agency as "the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power"

(*Psychic Life* 15), when "the self forms itself, but it forms itself within a set of formative practices that are characterized as modes of subjectivations" (*Undoing* 321). *Assujettissement*, Butler insists, resides in the subject taking an "oppositional relation to power" (*Psychic Life* 17), deriving its agency from resistance. As such, the performative processes of resistance, voluntary insubordination, and fulfilling a purpose unintended by power enact the subject-agent into being.

Moreover, a performative perspective on the subject allows one to see subjectivities as constantly made and remade, the product of language processes, therefore multiform, variable, and permeable. The performative in the poststructuralist framework grants a conceptional tool for understanding the subject as a function of the signifier that does not lean on a fixed and independent signified. Finally, the performative theory allows one to trace the process of the production of both the marked and unmarked elements of dichotomies such as woman/man, black/white, homosexual/heterosexual.

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In addition to addressing the shifting and variable subject and attainable agency, two of poststructuralism's most difficult issues, the discursive-reflexive paradigm has affected other aspects of subjectivity, most importantly, the relational subject and the narrating subject, as posited by theories of intersubjectivity and autobiography, respectively. These are two very significant influences which, given the space limits, I cannot discuss here.

What I demonstrated in my essay is really just the beginning of the performative's theoretical trajectory, its certain victory march. Produced by the linguistic turn and reflecting the postmodern epistemic shift, the discursive-reflexive paradigm, confirming the belief that language holds the world, offers a tool for explaining the linguistic nature of acts. Reaching several disciplines from philosophy and gender studies to history and economics, it has brought about a true paradigm change in the Kuhnian sense, a "paradigm-induced change in scientific perception" (Kuhn 116), affecting a change of world view, or a scientific revolution, in the humanities and social sciences: the performative turn.

BEHAVIORAL PARADIGMS IN THE SHORT FICTION OF HENRY JAMES
An Intersubjective Approach

The short fiction of Henry James offers an ideal ground for character studies, in particular the investigation of interactional paradigms, from an intersubjective perspective. Some of James' characters are clearly defined in terms of how they perceive themselves and the others, whether they recognize other perspectives than their own, or not; whether they open onto Others, or not; whether they are touched by Others, or not. Other characters bear gendered marks of language behavior, normative or transgressive styles of speaking. In my study, I explore these two major interactional paradigms in James' short fiction, grounding my discussion in intersubjective theory, providing, along the way, an overview of the relevant claims of intersubjective theory that I apply in my interpretation.

Intersubjective theory and interactional relations in James's short fiction

The concept of intersubjectivity was introduced in Husserl's Sorbonne lectures (1929), later published as *Cartesian Meditations*. Here Husserl claims that the recognition of other subjectivities—of the existence and individual aims of Others—provides the grounds for all ethical relations. "Within the bounds of positivity we say and find it obvious that, in my own experience, I experience not only myself but Others—in the particular form: experiencing someone else" (48). This ethical relation—that includes both recognition and self-recognition, presence, and co-presence—acts as the condition for perceiving the world from the perspective of the Other; in other words, as the condition of objectivity. For objectivity—when I realize that my perspective is one of many, therefore, I hold no privilege on truth—is fundamentally intersubjective. We can only experience the world as an intersubjective medium if we also realize that Others experience it differently, or if we are capable of transgressing the particularity of our perspective. Otherwise we do not perceive the Other as subject but only as object, the object of our perception.

In his 1923 essay *Ich und Du* (English translation, *I and Thou*, to appear in 1937), Martin Buber describes a "twofold attitude" of man to the world: the *I-It* and the

I-Thou relation; here the *I-It* relation does not involve "the whole being," but the *I-Thou* relation does (3). While the former sees the Other as object, the latter experiences the Other as consciousness and subject. "If I face a human being as my Thou," Buber writes, "he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things [...] he is *Thou* and fills the heavens (8). Buber insists on the reciprocity of this relationship, which corresponds to what intersubjective theory defines as recognition, claiming that the simultaneity of *I-affecting-Thou* and *Thou-affecting-I* account for this "primal experience" (21–22) or "relational event" (33). Moreover—and here Buber forecasts a fundamental principle of intersubjective theory—, it is by this recognition of the Other that the subject comes about: "Through the *Thou* a man becomes *I*" (28).

Theories of recognition emphasize the intimate connection between recognition and self-recognition, or recognition and self-consciousness. The self cannot recognize itself without recognizing the Other. This is the foundation of all human communication; as Jenny Slatman claims, "I recognize myself, distinguished from that which does not belong to me: and I recognize the Other as a being who, like myself, has a sense of herself and may be concerned for herself (321–22). Perception, Slatman goes on, is always linked to a particular horizon entailing a particular perspective. But relations and consequently recognition can only come about if the horizons meet: if the participants share a world (329); "one recognizes the Other as someone with whom one shares a meaningful world" (340). Nick Crossley also identifies the recognition of other consciousnesses as the precondition of self-awareness, self-consciousness. Consciousness, he claims, must decenter itself, "identifying and acknowledging its own particularity as a perspective upon the world amongst other perspectives" (17).

James offers diverse explorations of characters who are unable to open to the Other and occupy a shared world with the Other, and who, therefore, are unable to experience the world in its fullness. Indeed, the typical James hero is a *voyeur* and a scopophiliac, whose gaze is one-directional and static. For example, the narcissistic John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" has only attention to himself, unable to reverse his gaze and see the Other. The painter living in Florence, Theobald from "The Madonna of the Future," sees the beautiful Serafina as the embodiment of the perfect Madonna, whom he could use for his own purpose. Rose Agathe, the eponymous heroine of the short story, is but a hairdresser's tool, an inanimate waxen head serving as the resting place for wigs, who the anonymous narrator falls in love with. In "Glasses," Flora Saunt degrades herself to a mere commodity satisfy-

ing the fetishism of the men as she accepts veritable blindness when refusing to wear glasses. In the story "Adina," the young woman offers herself to the handsome peasant boy who has been wrongly deprived by Scrope, Adina's former fiancé, of the carved topaz he found in the fields, thus claiming a ridiculously low value of herself in exchange for the stone piece of jewelry dating back to the time of Emperor Tiberius.

Considering my first example only here, "The Beast in the Jungle," it is fair to claim that, because John Marcher is unable to experience the world by opening up to the Other, he is unable to overcome his inertia. Since, as Brian Massumi puts it, "every perception is a creative activity" (*Semblance and Event* 27), he is also unable to commit to any creative act. He suffers because he cannot live his life in full; since he has no attention to anyone but himself, he is unable to read himself. May Bartram, on the other hand, is a perceptive woman open to the world, who faithfully stores in her memory all the events relating to the man, capable of calling them forth as well. She is a good observer, who can ask pertinent searching questions too. May is a complete human being with the potential to creatively understand the Other; having allowed herself to be touched by the dilemma of Marcher, she opened up to perceiving and experiencing. As one touched by the Other, she manages to gear Marcher to his belated enlightenment. As a person capable of involving the Other into the creative process of perception and cognition, Bartram is both touched and touching, understanding, and helping to understand.

Marcher is one of those James heroes who suffer for not knowing who they are. Because they are unable to follow with attention the events around them, they cannot see their own selves either, no matter with what intensity these modern-day Narcissuses watch their images in the river. Only very slowly does he learn to see himself from another's perspective; when this happens, it is too late, after May died. His learning curve follows what Merleau-Ponty calls chiasm, the intertwining of perspectives that offers knowledge of oneself.

> As soon as I see, it is necessary that the vision (as is so well indicated by the double meaning of the word) be doubled with a complementary vision or with another vision: myself seen from without, such as another would see me, installed in the midst of the visible. ("The Intertwining—The Chiasm" 134)

Desiring knowledge of ourselves, we must learn to be open, the Merleau-Pontyan thesis goes, "to visions other than our own," which then give "the limits of our

factual vision" (143). Indeed, this is exactly what happens to Marcher and Bartram: the chiasmatic state of a "reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other" (138) comes about between the man focused on himself and the woman helping the man in his search for his secret, with the "possibility for reversion" (142) taking place as well, as John becomes capable of turning May's perspective into his own.

Merleau-Ponty insists that such chiasmatic meetings are always grounded in perception. The only perception triggered by the meeting of two sets of eyes, two gazes, can set off a communication process to culminate in knowing: when I think the Other and understand him too. This experience of perception means, he claims, that it brings back the moment when things, truths, and good come to be constituted for us, and that this experience provides us with a logos to be born; for "Perception is a nascent *logos*" (*The Primacy of Perception* xv).

> By these words, "the primacy of perception," we mean that the experience of perception is our presence at the moment when things, truths, values are constituted for us; that perception is a nascent *logos*; that it teaches us, outside all dogmatism, the true conditions of objectivity itself; that it summons us to the tasks of knowledge and action. (25)

Judith Butler provides another theoretical link to this problematic. In her recent *Senses of the Subject*, she devotes three chapters to Merleau-Ponty, pointing out that the French philosopher relies on his Cartesian predecessor of the 17th–18th century, Nicolas Malebranche, when setting up the three points of the intersubjective process. It is "the primary touch that inaugurates experience" (41), followed by a sense of being touched ("I can feel only what touches me," Malebranche writes [qtd. in *Senses of the Subject* 42]), resulting in the sense of the I—the self who feels, knows, and acts. That is, the person reaches the point of subjecthood: becomes a subject capable of feeling, knowing, and acting.

As intersubjective processes, feeling, knowing, and acting are clearly connected through language. The self is forged out of dialogical events channeled by language. The precondition for the subject's opening onto the Other is social dialogue. Marcher's inability to feel is deeply connected with his inability to conduct reciprocal dialogues with Bartram. He needs twenty years to develop in himself a Bakhtinian "responsive attitude," as well as an "actively responsive understanding" of the Other (68). For twenty years, he has no capacity for "co-creation" (172), and only touched

by the woman's death does he become capable of "creative understanding" (xiii). During such creative understanding, Bakhtin claims,

> it is immensely important for the person who understands to be located outside the object of his or her creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are others. (5)

Only through the dialogic co-creativity slowly acquired during the twenty years of their conversations will Marcher recognize his cemetery epiphany, when he is touched by an unknown face which he understands to be suffering for the loss of his beloved. The stranger touched by loss becomes the touching, passing on to Marcher the capacity to perceive, to experience, and to live. In other words, Marcher achieves a desired sentience via two intersubjective relations, one with Bartram and another with the stranger, which together, intertwined and chiasmatic, reach the path of what Massumi, relying on Deleuze, calls becoming. Tying relationality to this process, Massumi calls such a process "relational becoming" (*Politics of Affect* 51), emphasizing the continuous reciprocal events forging the relationship of two people through which knowledge of one is triggered by the perspective of the Other, while also opening a perspective on the world.

James often approaches this problematics from the negative: what happens when the characters are not touched by Others, nor do they experience any forms of relational becoming. The story "In the Cage" presents a telegraphist whose main preoccupation is to put together the details of the lives of the people whose telegraphs she is sending off. No matter how many details she is familiar with, she does not understand her customers' true stories because she is only a *voyeur* outside of their intersubjective dialogue. In the absence of reciprocal events, her deciphering proves to be false: the relationship she assumes to be a secret heterosexual romance is presented to the reader as a cover-up rather, and the pain on Captain Everard's face is not from love but from anxiety over being found out and blackmailed. The woman's fictioning of the telegraphs is then prompted by misperception and assumptions pre-existing the texts; her reading is based on her presuppositions concerning the compulsory heterosexuality of love and the assumption that any secret has to somehow relate to illicit heterosexual romance. That is, the absence of reciprocal

events—of touching and being touched—necessarily results in the absence of knowledge. And although the reader is not in full possession of knowledge either (James's secrets most often are not revealed), we can suspect that the threat of blackmail is somehow connected to the Captain's homosexuality. As such, "In the Cage" is yet another text with which James contributes to the conceptualization of homosexuality going on in the 1890s by claiming that understanding requires being touched, while being touched requires a certain intersubjective involvement, the participation in the chiasmic intertwining of perspectives.

Forms of gendered relationality in language

Linguistic dialogue plays a crucial role in intersubjective theory, for Merleau-Ponty in particular. For it is language that forms the "common ground" between the self and the Other in the "experience of dialogue"; it is language that makes up the "common world," where "our perspectives merge into each other" (*The Phenomenology of Perception* 354). And although we may never be able to fully understand the Other's perspective—"The grief and anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed" (356)—we can construct a common ground in which to communicate. This linguistic common ground emerges out of a pact, Merleau-Ponty insists, as the "interworld" that is the project of both participating parties (357).

Linguistic common ground serves as the repository of cultural scripts. In his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1956), Erving Goffman writes about "abstract standards" (26) or "abstract stereotyped expectations" (27) that the individual learns so that he or she would know what "officially accredited values of the society" to appropriate during the social performances or presentations of the self (35). While Goffman defines the self as the "*product* of a scene that comes off […], as a performed character" (252) or a "dramatic effect" (253), he also allows for a discursive common ground collecting the social scripts that regulate the dramatic staging of the self.

Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin offer a different perspective on relational events. Writing about "the relational construction of the self" (Chodorow 149), Chodorow ties the "search for meaningful subjectivity" (145) to the topic of intersubjectivity. Refuting the Freudian ideal of individuality defined by separation—an ideal tailored exclusively to male autonomy and individuality—Chodorow emphasizes the conceptualization of "the self as inexorably social and intrinsically con-

nected" (158). While Freud's model excludes the role of others in the construction of the self, object-relations theory "directs attention to the interrelations of individuality and collectivity or community" (152), and, as a consequence, to the role mutual engagements play in the production of the self. Benjamin also emphasizes that the traditional psychoanalytic model, valorizing separation and differentiation, helps interpret relationships of domination only, where the separating party realizes his domination over the person he separated from. "The problem of domination begins with the denial of dependency" ("Master and Slave" 283), she writes. This concept of the subject shows a fundamental difference from that of critical feminist psychoanalytical theory, which posits a concept of individualism that balances separation and connectedness, agency, and relatedness ("A Desire of Ones's Own" 82). Benjamin insists that the recognition of female desire—"that one *is* a subject of desire, an agent who can will things and make them happen" (87)—serves as the precondition of female subjectivity. For the intersubjective mode, Benjamin asserts, "assumes the paradox that in being with the Other, I may experience the most profound sense of self" (92). Breaking with "the logic of only one subject" (*Shadow of the Other* 82), Benjamin's paradigm allows for symmetrical relations between two subjects. According to Benjamin's "intersubjective view," "the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects"; for "the Other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right" (*Bonds of Love* 19–20).

Linguistic dialogue serves as an important pillar in Butler's intersubjective theory. In her Adorno lectures, given in 2003 and published in 2006 as *Giving an Account of Oneself,* she takes Nietzsche's starting point claiming, "I begin my story of myself only in the face of a 'you' who asks me to give an account" (11). Butler connects linguistic context, narrativity, and dialogical relation with the recognition of the Other. Here the illocutionary act of performing the self and the perlocutionary act of persuading the Other meet as they produce an intersubjective relation together. Reinforcing the intersubjective claim concerning the linguistic common ground, Butler also emphasizes that the recognition of the Other and being recognized by the Other can only take place in language (28). For it is language that makes possible narrative recognition and self-narration conducted in order to achieve this recognition; this happens within a linguistic-dialogical situation, where not only is the Other, the addressee of self-narration, present, but also the possibility of persuading the Other. Our narrative self is produced as we talk *to* someone; the self is born out of a web of relations, when one body talks to another. "My efforts to give an account of myself founder in part because I *address* my account, and in addressing

my account I am exposed to you" (38). Subjectivity, then, is always relational: "the only way to know oneself is through a mediation that takes place outside of oneself" (28). Recognition and self-recognition are, in short, linguistic (or narrative) acts. As such, Butler's concept of intersubjectivity accommodates discursivity and narrativity, the self/Other communicative situation, and the idea of mutual recognition.

James was acutely interested in gendered forms of relationality and the ways language frames gender positions in intersubjective relations. Throughout his career, he was preoccupied with the characteristic features of female speech, the significance of silence surrounding women, as well as the subversive act of woman coming to speak. His critics seem to be in agreement on the peculiar features of the way James's characters speak. Among these, Ralf Norrman discusses referential uncertainty or ambiguity, especially the "confusion in pronominal reference" leaving open the question of "who is who" (1); intersentence links suggesting hesitation and the understanding that nothing is ever final; as well as "changes in position" (3), also suggesting insecurity and instability. Although Norrman does not interpret these features as gendered, subsequent research in female language—that of Robin Lakoff, Carol Gilligan, Deborah Cameron, and Pierre Bourdieu, among others—clearly assigns these marks to women. Studying gendered linguistic norms, Lakoff concludes that language, including its most concrete syntactic and lexical structures, displays marks of power or powerlessness; "language use can tell us about the nature and extent of any inequity" (39). Gilligan claims that patriarchy demands a very specific language use of women; as the manifestation of such social scripts as empathy and intersubjectivity, this voice will be softer and more insecure than that of men, reflecting "the limits of autonomy and control" (172). Cameron describes the "weak, trivial, and deferential style" of women as deriving from their "training in how to be subordinate" (23), while Bourdieu insists on a symbolic relation between language on the one hand and wealth and power on the Other. As he claims, "utterances are not only [...] signs to be understood and deciphered, they are also *signs of wealth*, intended to be evaluated and appreciated, and *signs of authority,* intended to be believed and obeyed" (67). And since patriarchy forbids autonomy and self-confidence for women, including female voice, it is no wonder that hesitancy, uncertainty, insecurity, indecision, and vacillation are understood as marks of women's language.

James's short piece entitled "The Story in It" offers an intriguing staging of the linguistic codes of gender. The speech of the two women protagonists, Mrs. Dyott

and Maud Blessingbourne, is characterized by exactly those features described by Norrman, namely, referential uncertainty or ambiguity, intersentence links, and a general sense of hesitancy manifest in a linguistic yielding to the male speaker, Colonel Voyt. As Donatella Izzo observes, "Maud uses interrogative, tentative, and reticent tones, and Mrs. Dyott only speaks to echo someone else's words" (217). As so many other James pieces, this story is characterized by "the Jamesian poetics of the narratibility of a nonstory," as Izzo puts it, (216), suggesting, in other words, that, apart from the power game of appropriating or not appropriating language, nothing actually happens. Their three-way dialogue hides an intricate triangular desire that encompasses two desiring women and one man, the common object of their longing. How very different this triangle is from the dominant intersubjective model captured by Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Girard, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, and Mary Jacobus, in which woman acts as the mediator and vehicle between the homosocial desires of men. Not only are the gender positions reversed in the James story, but the direction of desire too: it is not the man who mediates between the desires of the women, nor do the women desire each other. Moreover, the women seem to be unable to give voice to their desires. In other words, although women start to own desire, their social subjection continues to gain expression in female silence and linguistic insecurity.

Female silence gets foregrounded in several James texts problematizing language and, in particular, the absence of speech as marks of one-directional and, consequently, failed attempts at intersubjective relations, as well as the symbolic linguistic manifestations of power structure. Whether successful or failed, intersubjectivity is regularly treated in terms of gender binaries, assigning first-person speech to men and hesitancy and silence to women.

"The Beast in the Jungle" offers one of the most memorable cases of female silence. Throughout this story that I have already discussed earlier from a different perspective, the woman does nothing else but listen to the man. John Marcher, the protagonist portrayed as an extreme narcissist, speaks to his listener for twenty years about his grand secret, hoping that the woman will help him uncover its content (which he himself does not know). The secret never revealing itself is the overriding theme of the story, the same as the theme of the decades-long asymmetrical encounter, assigning to woman the patriarchal role of the patient listener and to the man and the no less patriarchal role of the self-centered speaker. While the subject of the story, as well as their *dialogue manqué,* refers to the secret homosexual desire of Marcher, the behavior of the woman participating in this search points at another,

no less silenced secret, the meaning of female listening and female silence. In other words, James presents the mysterious silence surrounding the taboo topic of homosexuality in such a way that he discusses at the same time another taboo topic relating to female submission coded in gendered discourse.

In some other stories, however, James seems to revise this binary gender script. Besides presenting characters who fully appropriate the linguistic codes of femininity, the author introduces women who demand a voice of their own in a subversive act that is allowed at times but forbidden at others. This is a radical innovation indeed, explicitly countering the traditional patriarchal interpretation of the relationship between gender and language.

The punishment of the woman who speaks provides the theme of the story "The Visits," in which the young Louisa Chantry must die after she repeatedly proclaims her love for Jack Brandon, thereby transgressing the normative Victorian gender script concerning the unsayability of female desire. What complicates her crime is the fact that her admission comes at her own initiative (she speaks "first"), and not as a response to the man's confession. As such, female autonomy does not only violate Victorian etiquette but the whole Western patriarchal set of norms concerning the demand that woman keep quiet and wait to be addressed by the man.

Side by side with woman respecting patriarchy's gender scripts, James presents several female characters who proclaim themselves autonomous subjects and even agents, having appropriated agency by some form of Foucauldian *assujettissement*: they look, speak, and act. This is indeed a most revolutionary feature of James's writing, assigning individual personhood through relationality to women; as Joyce Warren points out, "What is revolutionary about Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880) is his depiction of the American individualist as a woman" (231), that is, his recognition of "the personhood of women" (239).

Agency appropriated by the woman through language is problematized in "Julia Bride." The beautiful young woman gains a bad reputation in society because her mother had been married and divorced several times; moreover, her own engagements were broken several times. In order to save her reputation, Julia devises an elaborate performance involving friends, the mother's former husbands, and her own former fiancés who are to attest to the fact that neither of the women are to blame for the liaisons gone wrong. In this extraordinary story, we hear the thoughts of the woman as the speaker of third-person internal monologues reflecting the thinking mind of a person learning to claim agency to herself. The free indirect discourse reveals a woman who refuses victimhood; she does this by adopting

a speech style that goes counter to all norms, approaching the speaking voice usually associated with men.

The female protagonist of "Georgina's Reasons" also belongs among James's women who speak (and speak a lot). Georgina is a sexual creature driven by her desires; she is an autonomous and assertive young woman who actually commits the crime of bigamy by first marrying the navy officer Raymond Benyon and later a wealthy businessman. She cleverly evades getting into trouble because the first husband is tied by the prenuptial promise to keep silent about the marriage. Such silencing of the man reverses the traditional gender division assigned to man as speaking agency: while Georgina speaks incessantly, repeatedly explaining, in a most self-conscious manner, the reasons behind her acts, the man is sentenced to silence. Georgina's transgression is twofold: not only does she appropriate language from the man, she does this in order to satisfy her sexual desire, by violating the laws of patriarchy with both acts.

Similarly active and assertive is the heroine of the story "Mora Montravers," who decides to marry, albeit as a formality, Walter Puddick, the genius artist with whom she had studied painting. With her marriage scheme, she aims to secure the annuity from her aunt and thereby to realize her artistic aspirations. Mora is a thinking woman with her own voice: a heroine, as Izzo points out, "who knows and who wills, and she is a winner" (258). That is, countering the patriarchal script and appropriating language from men, she forges her own agency. From an intersubjective perspective, one can posit that the antipatriarchal Mora conducts a dialogue with the scripts of patriarchy when reversing the roles assigned to men and women; not only does the woman come to speech here but assigns the female position of silence to the man.

James is known to have no final word on human relations in his fiction but to constantly reevaluate the interactions of his characters. As he wrote to Mrs. F. H. Hill, on March 21, 1879, "Nothing is my last word on anything—I am interminably super-subtle and analytic—and with the blessing of heaven, I shall live to make all sorts of representations of all sorts of things" (*Selected Letters* 161). Yet "Mora Montravers," the last story James wrote, does give his "last word" of sorts on a young woman with a mind of her own. As the culminating point in the long line of stories depicting women trying to break free, "Mora Montravers" is, as Izzo puts it, "the final seal to his representation of the feminine," casting "a retrospective light over the long road traveled that far" (258), while also offering, through a deep analysis of intersubjective relations, the ultimate dream of subjectivation and agency.

THE MARKING AND THE TELLING
Versions of the Stigma Narrative as Given by Anne Hutchinson, Emily Dickinson, and Philip Roth

John Winthrop, Governor of Massachusetts Bay Colony for most of the twenty years between 1629 and 1649, has several entries in his journal-history about—as he puts it—"monster" children born to women of the colony who were "possessed with Satan" (December 6, 1638; *Journal* I: 279). These births occurred in 1637 and 1638, right in the years of the antinomian controversy, when Anne Hutchinson was tried for being a "nimble-tongued woman" (qtd. in Susan Howe 116) and for becoming a "disturber in Israel" (see Amy Schrager Lang, Ch. 2, "Disturber in Israel"). Indeed, what these women, mothers of supposedly deformed babies, shared was having been, as the Governor himself puts it, "notoriously infected with Mrs. Hutchinson's errours" (261).

Among Winthrop's entries we have the one of March 27, 1638, where he reported the premature birth of Hutchinson's own child:

> It was a woman child, stillborn, about two months before the just time, having life a few hours before; it came hiplings till she turned it; it was of ordinary bigness; it had a face, but no head, and the ears stood upon the shoulders and were like an ape's; it had no forehead, but over the eyes four horns, hard and sharp; two of them were above one inch long, the other two shorter; the eyes standing out, and the mouth also; the nose hooked upward; all over the breast and back full of sharp pricks and scales [...] it had two mouths, and in each of them a piece of red flesh sticking out; it had arms and legs as other children; but instead of toes, it had on each foot three claws, like a young fowl, with sharp talons. (267)

Winthrop cited two authorities to confirm his description: John Cotton, once a good friend to Hutchinson (she and her politically influential merchant husband were in his congregation) and the attending physician, Mr. Clarke. Cotton testified to the open assembly in Boston in Latin, saying that the child had twenty-seven "lumps of man's seed, without any alteration, or a mixture of anything from the woman," while the doctor, in his expert opinion, counted "lumps [...] twenty-six or twenty-seven, distinct and not joined together," and compared the child to fish (272–73).

After her husband died in 1642, Hutchinson and her ten children were moved to Long Island Sound, to all become in the following year the innocent victims of the ferocious attack of the Mohegan Indians, conducted out of revenge for the brutal attacks of the Dutch settlers on Siwanoy Indians near New Amsterdam. Anne Hutchinson was taken to court and banished from the Colony for well-known reasons: for her ideas by which she contested the spiritual authority of Puritan patriarchy. Denying that works could fulfill the secular commission, she refused that election was predicated upon good citizenship or that the public errand of the New Israel would signal the private experience of conversion. She held meetings in her house, and dared even to cite the law in her defense: "It is lawful for me so to do," she proudly claimed (Hutchinson, "What Law" 49). She interpreted the custom allowing the elder members of the congregation to teach the younger members as applying to women too: "It was in practice before I came therefore I was not the first" (49). She became a threat to the community because she rejected the idea of a national covenant and the governing myth of the city on the hill. Indeed, Hutchinson thus came to be seen as opposing the very idea of America.

Moreover, she was found guilty because she usurped the territory of men: that of the mind and the intellect. For knowing the law and constantly citing it; claiming to have a conscience, relying on her conscience when matters of faith needed to be decided, and daring to find truth in her conscience. "Now if you condemn me for speaking what in my conscience I know to be truth I must commit myself unto the Lord," she insisted during the trial (Hutchinson, "Examination" 35). She was sentenced, then, for her unwomanly actions, or, as Winthrop put it in the trial, for "being a woman not fit for our society" (39). Hutchinson refused to accept her position as a non-intellect, excluded from the community of intellectuals, "whose chief business it was to argue," as David Hollinger succinctly puts it (47). Moreover, she refused to accept the position that her knowledge was, to use the Foucauldian terminology, subjugated knowledge, "a whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated" (*Power/Knowledge* 82). Subjugated knowledge, in this case, because the subjection of women would demand that their knowledge be limited to the proper sphere of the woman—matters of the body, corporeality, in this case.

And indeed, her punishment also targeted her body, when she was accused of a bodily crime, so to speak, a crime for which the body can be held solely responsible. Her female body that has given birth to a "monster," the devil itself,

obviously,[1] will be shown to threaten by bringing disorder and chaos. Such de-humanization, as well as demonization, of the woman (going hand in hand for many centuries, as Jack Holland has demonstrated), of course, fitted into Western tradition, where first the Greeks and Romans considered, as Thomas Fahy has explored, "monstrous bodies" "omens of political and civil chaos" (4), and where later St. Augustine, for example, saw the deformed bodies as "divine warnings against the dangers of pride, disobedience, and waning faith" (4–5). Such a disabled baby blurred all boundaries between "normal" and "abnormal," the self and the non-self, the desired and the repulsed, the feminine and the monstrous, as well as, finally, the maternal and the abject. It is indeed Kristeva's abject that seems operative here, in this narrative of expulsion, preparing for the ultimate banishment of the "disturber," preparing her "*ex*corporation" by de-humanizing and demonizing her own *ex*corporated, the new-born child (see Cheyette 79). Not only is there a complete disregard for personal boundaries, not only do contemporary authorities give supposedly eyewitness accounts of what they could neither see nor see right, but claim to have seen some monstrous object "jettisoned" indeed, to adopt Kristeva's words from her theorizing of the abject, "out of that boundary" (69). The newborn child is made into a devilish monster by Cotton and the physician by being categorized as just tissue and lumps: in other words, corporeal waste, which is the most typical instance of the abject. So, the two points Kristeva makes in connection with the abject ring singularly true of the Hutchinson scandal: "The feminine [...] becomes synonymous with a radical evil that is to be suppressed" (68), and it is "the logic of *exclusion* that causes the abject to exist" (65).

Of course, Hutchinson's punishment took another form as well: living in a Puritan community known for repressing and censoring passions and colonizing dissent, she was prohibited from giving her own story. We have no narrative by Hutchinson of either her trial or the birth of her deformed baby—nothing that would contest Winthrop's account. What we do have, however, is the suppressed narrative of the governor, omitting, as James Phelan observes, "significant information [...] relevant to the character, situation, or event being reported on" (138).

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[1] That Winthrop saw the workings of Satan in the malformed babies of these women is clear from his description of the stillborn infant born to Mary Dyer, a well-known follower of Hutchinson, where he implied, as Carol F. Karlsen has convincingly demonstrated in her classic book, that during the birth of the "monster with horns, claws, and scales" the "bed whereon the mother lay did shake" (Winthrop, *Journal* I: 268; Karlsen 17).

I read Winthrop's description, as well as the testimonies of Cotton and the attending physician, as a discursive gesture making a public male exhibit out of a most private female or feminine situation. As such, it offers the earliest record of human curiosities in America, preceding by nearly a century and a half the description of one Miss Honeywell of Salem (1809), commonly taken as the earliest record of the "freak," to use a word which gained its meaning of "monstrosity, an abnormally developed individual" (see Fahy 7) in the mid-19th century only. In a culture that easily saw the *racialized* body as monstrous (indeed, the Native Americans were first depicted as monstrous lower beings [see Cassuto 30–49])— the stigmatization of Hutchinson's baby stands as the first instance when a *gendered* body was made a grotesque spectacle. The monster in the 18th century was defined, as Rosi Braidotti claims, "as having some excess, lack, or displacement of his/her organs"; as having "too many parts or too few, right ones in the wrong places" (290). Moreover, monsters have been linked "to the female body in scientific discourse through the question of biological reproduction" (291)—a claim well supported by the Hutchinson scandal. Described as having protruding-bulging eyes and a gaping mouth, and retaining "its excrescences (sprouts, buds)," "mountains and abysses"—Anne Hutchinson's child seems to exhibit all the features by which Bakhtin defines the monstrous ("The Grotesque" 93) as well:

> Of all the features of the human face, the nose and the mouth play the most important part in the grotesque image of the body; the head, ears, and nose also acquire a grotesque character when they adopt the animal form or that of inanimate objects. [...] The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes. [...] It is looking for that which protrudes from the body, all that seeks to go out beyond the body's confines. Special attention is given to the shoots and branches, to all that prolongs the body and links it to other bodies or to the world outside. [...] But the most important of all human features for the grotesque is the mouth. It dominates all else. The grotesque face is actually reduced to the gaping mouth; the other features are only a frame encasing this wide-open bodily abyss. (92)

Now let me turn to another instance in American literary history, significant for the way power attempts to discursively construct the woman's intellect through the body. It concerns the correspondence between Emily Dickinson and T. W. Higginson. The moment is the spring and early summer of 1862, which, people will

know, is her most difficult year, known as *annus mirabilis* in Dickinson scholarship. In his reply to Dickinson's first letter, where he performs what she then calls the "surgery" (even though he doesn't seem to have the faintest clue to her poetry)—Higginson wants to know a particular thing before giving his expert opinion: her age. And then gets this answer:

> You asked how old I was? I made no verse—but one or two—until this win-ter—Sir. (L261[2])

1862 was, of course, her most productive year, when she wrote probably 360 poems altogether, making her poetic output total at around 650.

Then a couple of months later, the acclaimed critic and hoped-for "preceptor" was again at a loss judging those queer pieces which this queer woman sent him, and decided to request more information—still not about her intellect, rather about the person. He asked for a portrait. As if knowing her age and knowing what she looked like would give him an entry to the text, a handle to its strangeness. But the male critic could not *not* consider, it seems, woman as body, woman trapped in her body; for him, her reason, mind, and soul were overshadowed by her bodily features. This is her famous reply to Higginson in her fourth letter to him:

> Could you believe me—without? I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur—and my Eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves. Would this do just as well? (L268)

Defying the male pressure to be confined to the body—and defying the current presupposition that "different degrees of disembodiment […] express the social hierarchy" (Douglas 80)—this woman poet gives a self-portrait in the form of what Phelan calls mask narration (201), a narration that is both corporeal and non-cor-poreal. Indeed, indulging in the modesty topos, she responds to his query directly by constructing herself as no more than a small wren-like woman, with bold hair and brown eyes. Yet in her subtext she abandons the modesty topos by constructing herself as a wildly original intellect, whose imagination allows her to bring together

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[2] The following abbreviations are used to refer to the writings of Emily Dickinson: J = *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. Thomas H. Johnson. Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1960. Citation by poem number. L =*The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Citation by letter number.

hair and chestnut bur, eyes, and sherry in the glass. Moreover, she will convey the solitude and sense of abandonment in the image of the sherry left in the glass by "the Guest" (always a significant person in Dickinson's poems)—convey all this, of course, only to the perceptive reader she hoped Higginson was too, or the perceptive reader she made Higginson into.

To come to my governing thesis, I read these examples as cases of stigmatization: discursive acts, where the language game collapses the distinction between fact and interpretation (see Hall 92). Stigmatization is here marking the body as different (as abject in Hutchinson's case); it is foregrounding the body so as to be able to disregard the mind (as in both Hutchinson's and Dickinson's case). This stigmatization allows for an investment of the body, to use Foucault's words, "with relations of power and domination," and places the body "in a system of subjection" (*Discipline* 26).

Of course, *stigmata* are the replica of Christ's wounds on the cross, meant to signify difference and election, the difference *of* election—election for suffering really for those who attained a form of spiritual perfection, making them one with Christ. They were also reminders of human mortality. Stigma, Erving Goffman writes, referred originally to "bodily signs designed to expose something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier" (1), pointing more and more to a "blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided" (1). As such, the phase subsequent to stigmatization was expulsion—much like Anne Hutchinson's. Since stigma is an "attribute that is deeply discrediting" (3), stigmatization is intricately tied to humiliation defined by Rorty as "forced re-description" (qtd. by Hall 126). Indeed, stigmatization uses the performative power of language in "making truth," here truth being a Rortyan "human creation" (qtd. by Hall 86). So stigma is not something "out there" but is a quality of our descriptions and re-descriptions, made visible by the marking of the body, body boundaries in particular.

In these texts, stigma is significantly about setting limits and confining the Other, in our cases, dissenting and deviant women, within those limits. Winthrop's re-description of Hutchinson is supposed to make her out as a failure of a mother, therefore a failure of a woman, whose child is less than human. Her knowledge will be subjugated knowledge—that of corporeal matters—, yet here even her body will err when producing a child. Or, when Higginson demands to know more about the body of this strangest woman (her age and her looks), he too sets a limit for her not to be crossed over to the realm of the intellect. These limits, it seems, are always corporeal, reminding the person, as it were, of being trapped into the body.

To follow a seemingly far-fetched association, I would like to claim that Richard Wagner's *Die Walküre* offers the most powerful musical example of stigmatization (even if done out of love, we could add)—and I know this is not the received interpretation. Yet when in the final act Wotan arranges for Brünnhilde's sleep, they both know (because they both know the Law and know that breaking the Law necessarily brings about punishment) that by the time she wakes up, the father will have marked her with the stigma of all human limitations. Stripped of the immortality owned by the child of two gods, Wotan and Erde, she will be an ordinary woman, and possibly even a subjected woman, when she finds a husband, (more precisely, when he finds her). Ceasing to be a Walküre, then, Brünnhilde will bear all the marks of corporeality and mortality that come with the Godhead's punishment—marks not unlike, in terms of the human limitations they reveal, the stigmata which the mortal Jesus came to bear on the cross.

Dickinson, of course, was not surprised at Higginson's effort of confining her to the female body. All through her life, she too felt this confinement, as if she was marked by a stigma of illness. In many of her letters, she presented herself as the weak Victorian woman just convalescing from a serious illness. I think it is fair to say that in her writings she constituted herself as the subject with an illness, allowing illness to emerge as the dominant marker of her subjectivity.

There was one particular illness which seems to dominate her general sense of being an ill and frail woman: her eye disease. "I have been sick so long I do not know the sun" (L435), she wrote to her sister Lavinia. Understanding the seriousness of this condition, what she most dreaded was going blind. Apart from the obvious reason—that she feared losing her ability to perceive the world visually—her fear stemmed from knowing too well how her age liked to exhibit "human curiosities." Barnum's American Museum opened in 1841 only, making freak shows "an organized institution" (see Fahy 4).

Although she was extremely secretive about the particulars of this illness, today we know (due to the work of scholars like James R. Guthrie) that it was a chronic optical disease, exotropia, "a deviation of the cornea that prevents the sufferer from achieving perfectly binocular vision" (Guthrie 11). Twice she went under treatment in Boston (in 1864 and 1865), where she lived for months in a boarding house while having to cover her eyes with bandages. She was not allowed to see the sun for long periods after; sometimes even house-light hurt her eyes. Her pain in bright sunshine never left her, as for the rest of her life she struggled with the illness:

My first well Day—since many ill—
I asked to go abroad,
And take the Sunshine in my hands,
And see the things in Pod
(J574)

Exotropia is a hereditary disease, carried, as Guthrie points out, matrilineally. As such, it corresponds to the kind of stigma which Goffman describes as "tribal"; these are, Goffman claims, "transmitted through lineages and equally contaminate all members of a family" (4). Experts seem to be able to recognize the stigma of this illness in Dickinson's portraits, especially the one taken at Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, as well as in portraits of Dickinson's mother and sister (Guthrie 11).

In American literature, probably Hawthorne's was a similar hereditary stigma, who suffered from the being marked by the sins of his two vehement Puritan forefathers. But in Dickinson's case, it was all corporeal, very obviously setting up, as stigmas do, limits, and confining her within these limits. These were limits of visual perception, eyes "finite" (qtd. in Guthrie 173), particularly painful for a poet with a fondness for the "Light" and the "Noon."

All this would not be worth discussing at such length had Dickinson not come up with a way of dealing with her stigma, or "stigma management" in Goffman's terminology (97). For, according to Goffman, two strategies of stigma management are possible: one being "to conceal or obliterate signs that have come to be stigma symbols" (92), the other, best evoked by the figure of Hester Prynne probably, being "disclosure, when the individual voluntarily wears the stigma symbol" (100). Dickinson chose the latter, of course, and in a most brilliant manner. Being limited by her eyesight, having to "guess at seeing" (1018), she made indeed "some sort of accommodation with illness" (Guthrie 27), learning to see in the dark. "We grow accustomed to the Dark," she writes (J419). Ultimately her stigma management was narrative: putting into writing all the forms and processes of stigma. There is a sense of hospitality in Dickinson toward the stigma of her illness; it is the hospitality of poetry, treating the illness in the Derridian manner as a welcome Guest. Dickinson would have been happy to go along with Derrida's reflections on the ambiguities of the Latin root word *hostis*, meaning "host," "enemy," "foreigner," "guest," and "hostage" alike (see Collins 586). And indeed, what at times seemed like the enemy, her severe eye illness, and whose hostage she often felt to be, became the guest

hosted by the poet through language. For, as Derrida famously claims, "language *is* hospitality" (*Of Hospitality* 135).

Here lies the major difference between Anne Hutchinson and Emily Dickinson: we only have the Hutchinson story as given by the stigmatizers, while she herself could not give her own account. Because the prohibition on narrative self-making is part of the stigma, Hutchinson was prevented from answering the pornographic gesture of the accusers, who marked her body as less than human, as docile, bestial, silent, and objectified, to adopt Susan Rubin Suleiman's summary of the markers of male pornography (9).

Dickinson's genius lies in recognizing that stigma management is necessarily discursive and narrative; only words possess a "reparative" power, to use D. W. Winnicott's term for the psychoanalytic talking cure (qtd. by Wesling 14).[3] In renouncing her desire for sensory stimulation (the bright light), Dickinson withdrew into language and the imagination, where the light was "Slant," and where her poems could become, as Guthrie points out, "adjuncts of the self" (172).

> Renunciation—is a piercing Virtue—
> The letting go
> A Presence—for an Expectation—
> Not now—
> The putting out of Eyes—
> Just Sunrise—
> Lest Day—
> Day's Great Progenitor—
> Outvie
> Renunciation—is the Choosing
> Against itself—
> Itself to justify
> Unto itself—
> When larger function—
> Make that appear—
> Smaller—that Covered Vision—Here—
> (J745)

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[3]   In a similar vein, Susan Wendell has written on how pain is easier to bear if it becomes an "experience" available for interpretation (326).

Interpreted by Guthrie as "Dickinson's self-admonition to rebandage her eyes rather than expose them to morning's light" (17), the poem opts for letting go of temporal and worldly matters so as to move into that other realm, the imagination. Disoriented by having to wear her bandages and therefore finding herself in darkness during the daytime too, she easily mistook day for the night: "Good Morning—Midnight," she writes in one poem (J425), and speaks about "Sunset on the Dawn" in another (J415). Amazed at how humankind acts as if blindfolded, unable to appreciate what it might see, she writes:

> Had we the eyes within our Head—
> How well that we are Blind—
> We could not look upon the Earth—
> So utterly unmoved—
> (J1284)

Elsewhere, blindness becomes a vehicle to make her see God.

> What I see not, I better see—
> Through Faith—my Hazel Eye
> (J939)

But it is due to her soul's "Bandaged moments" (J512) that she identifies death with not seeing: in "I felt a funeral in my brain," for example, the dead person in the coffin is "but an Ear" (J280). It is along these lines too that one of her well-known tautologies for death was born: "I could not see to see" (J465). Or in another poem: "Image of Light, Adieu" (J1556).

It seems quite reasonable to claim that Dickinson owed, at least in part, her stunningly original and complex metaphorizing of death to her eye problems, eye treatment, and the ensuing fear that she might go blind. In one of her most tender notes sent to Susan in 1883, when Gilbert, Susan's son and Emily's favorite nephew died, she described—in a gesture of sympathy—his suffering on earth as under the "menace of light," while conceptualizing his death as a state where a "Rendevous of Light" is already possible because "Dawn and Meridian are one" (Sewall 204–5).

> Pass to thy Rendevous of Light,
> Pangless except for us—

Who slowly ford the Mystery,
Which thou hast leaped across!
(J1564)

Dickinson has managed to use her physical impairment, which she always feared would de-humanize her, as an impetus to a higher level of consciousness. She used her stigma marking as a vehicle to a greater understanding of the significance of her life. To not just be, but to know about being too.[4]

Now I would like to turn to my cases of racial stigma. The first one is about particular visual narratives of lynching. In January 2000, I had the good fortune to see in New York an exhibit of lynching photographs. These were all postcards that white people sent to friends and family to chronicle the events of physical torture, the stigma burning, which they had witnessed. The photographs were, as Fahy claims, "visual souvenirs that were widely sold and collected at lynchings" (20), capturing "the ritualistic spectacle of lynchings" (20), and found their ways to family albums, a popular art form in the 19th century designed to chronicle and celebrate special occasions. As such, the photographic albums "functioned as a home-constructed freak show" (19), where physical stigma was reinforced by social stigma, burned upon the body by the narrative gaze of the prejudiced witnesses. The victims themselves, however, were deprived of any form of stigma management—until this exhibition was put on. Indeed, I see the exhibit and the subsequent book that was put together of the photographs (Allen et al.) as a belated attempt of stigma management, which—although unable to annul the crime or resurrect the victims—becomes reparative. By telling about lynchings as well as about such the peculiar discourses surrounding lynching, the exhibit successfully defies the long prohibition of narrative self-making, preventing African Americans from reaching a higher knowledge about being.

And, finally, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*. Here the protagonist, Coleman Silk, classics professor and former dean of small Athena College, passes over from black to white, more precisely, to the ethnically marked version of white, Jewish. Having, as a man of colored ancestry, performed Jewishness, he simply replaces one stigma

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[4] In an essay dated 1997, the African American sociologist Felly Nkweto Simmons discusses her difficulties when speaking, at conferences, about the racialized body as a personal experience. "My authority to do this," she claims, "is questioned or dismissed as subjective and 'confessional.' I'm expected to *be, but not to know about being*" (52). All this is painfully reminiscent of Frederick Douglass's complaint of being used by white abolitionists as illustration only for their claims but always being denied the possibility of giving his own interpretation.

for another, becoming, as the narrator puts it, "a heretofore unknown amalgam of the most unalike of America's historic undesirables" (132).

With the narrative of stigma foregrounded in several ways, I see the novel turn on the topos interlocking stigma and narration.

First, Silk's performance is all too discursive. He invents his Jewishness, the Jewish stigma, with words, when at age twenty-six he decides to fiction his racial origins, making up an elaborate story about the saloon keeper Jewish father and the whole family. He passes down this fiction to his four children, providing the grounds for their Jewishness too. So, it seems, all races can be performed, even the Jewish; all one needs is a narrative of family stigma, which will performatively bring about the stigma identity. In other words, stigma identity does not pre-exist the narrative; rather, it is the narrative that creates this identity founded on stigma.

Running away as far as possible from "the tyranny of the we and its we-talk" (108), Coleman decides to craft and follow his own personal Emancipation Proclamation and thereby make himself into a free individual.

> [F]ar from there being anything wrong with his decision to identify himself as white, it was the most natural thing for someone with his outlook and temperament and skin color to have done. All he'd ever wanted, from earliest childhood on, was to be free: not black, not even white—just on his own and free. (120)

This Emancipation Proclamation is the narrative of his family history in the form of make-believe: it is a piece of discourse whereby he reinvents himself.

When Mrs. Silk is visited by her son for the last time before he disappears forever, she is naturally crushed at the thought of never seeing him again, or ever seeing his future wife and children. She is disappointed because Coleman shows no race consciousness: "Lost himself to his own people," she says (324). But for Silk, it is the lack of a piece of discourse comparable to the one he makes up which allows his self-construction as a Jew. "You think like a prisoner. You do, Coleman Brutus. You're white as snow and you think like a slave," the mother tells him (139). What she does not understand, however, is that he gains a different kind of freedom by his narrative self-making, by his self-fashioning as a stigmatized Jew.

Second, the reader gets familiarized with Silk's passing through Nathan Zuckerman's imagining the events. In his imaginative reconstruction—"live-entering" (*vzhivanie*) in Bakhtinian terminology—the narrator does not tell of how it "really"

happened, but how he imagined it to have happened. All through his life, Silk considered his secret unspeakable and unnarratable; he never allowed himself—as the stigmatized and also the stigmatizing individual—to become the narrating-I who would take responsibility for what he has done. Therefore, the narration of stigma, both the received and the given stigma, could not have a reparative effect, bringing about a psychological reconciliation with the ones he harmed: those who he abandoned and those who he lied to.

Third, the final fall of Silk is brought about by a stigmatizing text of sorts too. His old-fashioned and quite innocent comment gets interpreted by Athena purists, this "highly judgmental and self-righteous" academic community, as one critic puts it (Safer 211), as a racial slur, a Rortyan humiliating re-description, causing his ultimate downfall. Unable to uncover his secret, Silk must die a death fitting a Greek hero, "in battle" (see Parrish 454), where the deaths of his wife and girlfriend come about as collateral damage to the primal tragedy.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

I have chosen four texts that represent different modes of interaction between stigma and narration. Neither Anne Hutchinson, nor the victims of lynchings were allowed to tell their own story, to give an alternative account to those of their stigmatizers. Coleman Silk constructed his narrative to rid himself of one stigma, but gave up on even the possibility of a narrative coming to terms with his current stigma, not the Jewishness, of course, but the lie. For all of them, telling about the marking would have allowed them to contest the narratives of power—church, white racists, and academia, respectively—and to perform the reconciliation which Emmanuel Lévinas calls Facing. Only Emily Dickinson was able to defy the prohibition of narrative self-making and properly host her stigma in language, thereby extending her boundaries. What they all subscribe to is not just that stigma management is always discursive, aiming at reparative narration, but that ultimately, for the stigma to be repaired, its re-descriptive markings as bodily limitations must be accommodated in and through language, bringing about a re-evaluation of frontiers.

TROPES OF INTERSUBJECTIVITY
Metalepsis and Rhizome in the Novels of H. D. (Hilda Doolittle)

In this essay I explore metalepsis and rhizome as the tropes of intersubjectivity in H. D.'s (Hilda Doolittle's) prose texts—*Asphodel*, *HERmione*, *Palimpsest*, *The Gift*, *Tribute to Freud*—, claiming not only that these texts are about forms of relatedness, but that plot is generated by the narrativity of two recurring tropes, metalepsis and rhizome (itself created by metalepses). In these texts coded by early feminism and early psychoanalysis, the self—through its metaleptic transfers to various rhizomatic planes—is narrativized as multiple, retaining subject positions in diverse alliances. Metalepsis and rhizome will be explored as elements of the rhetoric of an alliance-based self, contributing to the construction of an inclusive subjectivity and of an acentered system of the unconscious.

Patricia Waugh, in her by now classic *Feminine Fictions*, identifies a "collective concept" of the subject in the works of women writers: "Much women's writing can, in fact, be seen not as an attempt to define an isolated individual ego but to discover a collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity *in relationship*" (10; emphasis in original). This idea of constructing the relational subject appears, Waugh claims, well before postmodernism, notably in women modernists such as Woolf, Richardson, Mansfield, and Stein. In *The Waves*, for example, Woolf seems to have "accepted and fictionally embodied the recognition that differentiation is not necessarily separateness, distance, and alienation from others, but a form of *connection* to others" (11; emphasis in original). This understanding of identity and selfhood is very different, Waugh insists, from the way male modernists perceived the construction of the self through impersonality and separation and by emphasizing the "virtues of distance, separateness, objectivity, independence" (19). Not feeling comfortable with this dominant aesthetics of impersonality, women writers "have sought alternative conceptions of subjectivity, expressing a definition of self in a relationship which does not make identity dependent axiomatically upon the boundaries and distance, nor upon the subjugation of others" (22).

Waugh connects this alternative idea of female subjectivation with Jessica Benjamin's feminist psychoanalytic theory of domination and intersubjectivity, as well as Nancy J. Chodorow's psychoanalytic social theory. Critical of Margaret Mahler's separation-individuation theory overemphasizing separation and limiting it to

separation from oneness, Benjamin posits the possibility of a subject-subject relationship (instead of a subject-object relationship), and stresses the importance of active engagement with others in the development of the self. This "intersubjective view" maintains that "the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects," Benjamin writes, and reorients "the conception of the psychic world from a subject's relations to its object toward a subject meeting another subject" (*Bonds of Love* 19–20). Aware of the dangers that women's relational self might become one of those "American tropes" which fix feminine identity within the binary system and "reinstall hierarchical gender categories as if they were simply pre-given" (*Shadow of the Other* 36). Benjamin posits the possibility of symmetry in the inter-subjective paradigm. Breaking with the "logic of only one subject" (42), which necessarily implies the Other as object, for whom subjectivation is only possible by reversal, she insists on an "inclusive subjectivity that can assume multiple positions and encompass the other within" (85). This is what she calls a "psychic subjectivity," allowing for "multiple, non-identical" subject positions (87). Chodorow's theory is rooted in the "object-relations theory" of Alice and Michael Balint, Melanie Klein, and others and is based on "a search for meaningful subjectivity and intersubjectivity" (Chodorow 145). This theory also emphasizes the "historically situated engagement" of people with others (148) and "the relational construction of the self (149). This theory, then, is capable of incorporating intersubjectivity and accommodating the interrelations between the individual and the community.

In this paper, I will read five prose texts by H. D. (Hilda Doolittle) through this alternative model of female subjectivation and intersubjectivity, claiming not only that H. D.'s novels are about the relational, alliance-based self, but that here plot is generated by the narrativity of two recurring tropes, metalepsis and rhizome (itself created by metalepses). I will discuss the two *romans à clef, Asphodel* (wr. 1921–22; publ. 1992) and *HERmione* (wr. 1927; publ. 1981); the two pieces of autobiographical fiction, *Palimpsest* (wr. 1923–24; publ. 1926) and *The Gift* (wr. 1941–44; publ. 1982); and her therapy notes, *Tribute to Freud* (wr. 1944; publ. 1984). What is common in these texts is that the selves, of which there seem to be always two or more, easily cross between the narrative levels, establishing a multiplicity of relations to be formed in.

Insisting on the symmetry of human relations, H. D. breaks with the logic of subject-object relations, and presents, instead, subjectivities that are capable of entering into subject-subject relationships with others as much as with their own selves. In these texts coded by early feminism and early psychoanalysis, the char-

acters seem to move freely between the multiple levels of fiction and memory, thereby constructing the relational, alliance-based self of the woman as well as an acentered system of the unconscious.

How do the tropes figure in the construction of this relational self? I will start with metalepsis.

A trope clearly overrepresented in H. D.'s fiction, metalepsis allows narrators as well as fabula actors to leap across the various frames and embedded structures with ease and playfulness, while the trope also gains a plot-potential in the sense that the narrativity of the trope develops into a plot. Moreover, metalepsis can be linked in H. D.'s case to two dominant discourses of modernity, psychoanalysis and feminism—which both, as Maggie Humm claims, "use a model of repression" (56), as well as, one might add, a model of the return of the repressed. If, indeed, fabula is the "execution of a program," as Mieke Bal claims (204), then this program has somehow to do with modernism itself, in particular its programs of feminism and psychoanalysis, both as much endorsed as subverted in these texts.

Given the multiple levels, layers, and frames of the genres of the autobiography, autobiographical fiction, and *roman à clef*, metalepsis acts as a Foucauldian "shifter" in the sense that not only does the author develop "second selves" but rather a "plurality of egos" ("What Is an Author?" 1631), where subjects of one level might turn up in relationships in the other. H. D.'s texts perform the narrative bravura of opening up between the extratextual, extradiegetic, diegetic, and hypodiegetic levels of the narrative, thereby extending the fabula beyond the events. Moreover, given the constative-performative (or representational-ontological) aporia at work in all autobiographies and autobiographical fiction, it is equally undecidable whether real or fictional-imagined events are being narrated—whether, in other words, the narrator narrates or constructs herself. Because while always insisting on her chronicling events that have happened in the spatial-temporal reality of her life when pulling in diverse fictional threads and structures, the narrator leaves contradictory signals in the texts, suggesting two parallel intentions: that of reporting (at the level of the frame narrative) and that of self-construction (at the level of the embedded narrative).

This toying with the borders between fiction and reality—as well as between frame and embedded narrative, and the described and the performed—is most obvious in the two *romans à clef*, *Asphodel* and *HERmione*. The novels are linked at the level of the plot too: *HERmione* gives an account of the events occurring before those narrated in *Asphodel*, the novel written earlier. In *HERmione,* the protagonist,

Her, after two unsuccessful relationships, finds her voice by using her body: "Her feet were pencils tracing a path through a forest" (223). "Now the creator was Her's feet, narrow black crayon across the winter whiteness" (223). Then in *Asphodel* she finds true love, whose presence also allows her creativity to flourish. As a way of acknowledging what she received from this woman—that her gift of writing could take form—Hermione makes a very particular gesture of intersubjectivity: she offers her own daughter as a gift to her lover, thereby proclaiming the child as the token of their alliance.[1]

Through both texts, Hermione exists in two distinct worlds: that of the novel and that of language. "[T]hey call her Her short for Hermione" (*Asphodel* 41). As is suggested by the privileged narrative position of the title, Hermione easily and continually crosses these boundaries between fiction and language, moving freely between the diegetic world and grammar. Indeed, as homonym of a subject's proper name and the accusative/dative declension form of the third person personal pronoun, Her is at once grammatical subject and object, folding, as it were, in itself a relational selfhood capable of acting as both agent and patient. However, with the pronoun constantly distanced and alienated into proper name, and with the coincidence of the accusative/dative and subjective forms foregrounding Her's relationality, the woman is all relationality, uncertain of either her diegetic or grammatical self.

Asphodel and *HERmione* can both be read as quest narratives coded by the discourses of modernity, with a protagonist who is seeking the fulfillment of female creativity and sexuality. Having appropriated the ethos of modernity, she does not doubt the existence of hidden dimensions; indeed, she senses a Chinese box structure of connected worlds, where every box contains another: "It appears," she muses, "there is a world within a world" (*Asphodel* 38). Her certainty extends to imagining the visible and audible physical world as controlled by the layers of culture and sexuality, as well as layers of the unconscious. For the female experimental modernist, these layers form either hierarchical metaphoric structures or non-hierarchical metonymical narrative spaces, and in both cases it is metalepsis that grants passageways across the structures and spaces.

H. D. seems to present all the varieties of narrative metalepsis as described by Gérard Genette (*Narrative Discourse* 234–237). Some belong to the classical type, where an extradiegetic or even extratextual character intrudes into the diegetic

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[1]   On the topic of the gift, see Adelaide Morris, "A Relay of Power and of Peace."

world (this is the "*Virgil has* Dido die" type in Genette). "Her thoughts were not her thoughts. They came from outside," claims the narrator of *Asphodel* (125). You have real people move into books, and a friend literally "drops in," into, *The Afternoon of a Faun.*

> It was all a book. They have wandered out of a world into a book. They were dream people and they were wandering in the pages of a book. (5)

> She had asked Dalborough to drop in and he *dropped* in the middle of the Après Midi d'un Faune. (44)

Inverse metalepsis (or antimetalepsis) appears even more frequently, where a diegetic character crosses over into the extradiegetic or extratextual world. Here we have multiple frames broken, since the extradiegetic—in fact the diegetic world for us readers—will be presented as having fiction intrude into it too. Indeed, what Hermione understands as her own extradiegetic life—diegetic for us—will be fully controlled by the mythological character Hermione, who is fictional for Her Gart as well. The narrator, however, hardly distinguishes between the extradiegetic and the diegetic: appropriating the fictional as well as the real, she claims both of these to belong to her own narrative. Repeatedly crossing over into the various diegetic levels—her own lived extradiegetic world and the intradiegetic world of her narrated fiction—she will have the textual and the autobiographical coexist in the same space.

> I know Shakespeare is real. *I'd count myself a king of infinite space* and that other thing—I can't remember—things like *sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes.* Those things are real. The child in *Trois Contes* dancing in tight drawers for the head of John the Baptist is somehow real, even Aphrodite. (53)

Shakespeare's "real" is, of course, the reality of his texts, the authorial name "Shakespeare" serving as a synecdoche for the plays. And the claim that "Shakespeare is real" will be justified by the smooth incorporation—without the distancing quotations marks—of the material text, the textual body, into the body of the novel.

Inverse metalepsis seems to have a very particular effect here: raising doubt in the reality of the extratextual level, it surrenders the outside world to uncertainty.

Unmaking or undermining the category of both the real and the fictional, metalepsis disrupts ontological as well as narrative hierarchies (the hierarchy of extratextual-extradiegetic-diegetic-hypodiegetic) in that on the one hand, it deprives extratextual characters of their existence in spatial-temporal reality, while on the other, it assigns an ontological status to fictional characters. It is of this type of narrative rupture that Genette wrote,

> Le plus troublant de la métalepse est bien dans cette hypothèse inacceptable et insistante, que l'extradiégétique est peut-être toujours déjà diégétique, et que le narrateur et ses narrataires, c'est-à-dire vous et moi, appartenons peut-être encore à quelque récit. (*Figures, essais* III, 245)[2]

With the diegetic boundaries becoming porous and permeable, worlds previously assumed separate will now merge, the outer becomes inner, and the inner outer, and the hierarchies between them get broken. And among all these levels, frames, boxes, and worlds, it is metalepsis that allows free transit for the self constantly in motion, seeking relations.

Given the fact that, as the narrator of *Asphodel* claims, "[t]hings existed on different planes" (88), Hermione will serve as the meeting point of all the words and (mythological) figures that might be associated with her name:

> Hermione, Helen and Harmonia. Hymen and Heliodora […].
> Hellas, Hermione, herons, hypaticas […] did names make people? (168)

The signifier does not describe but rather brings about the signified, itself a signifier, together with all its (textual) features, character traits, and possible fates. For example, the winged Hermes resides within Hermione's body, while also stepping out of it some times; but whenever she leaves Her's body, she returns thereafter: "Conscientiously she had crawled back to her body, after she had winged out, gold, gold gauze of wings" (144). She is in Paris, Shanghai, New Orleans, or Rotterdam at the same time; or in Plato's spheres, which will allow her to enter the deep levels of the unconscious.

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[2] English translation: "The most disturbing thing about metalepsis really lies in that unacceptable but insistent hypothesis, that the extradiegetic is maybe always already diegetic, and that the narrator and his narratees, that is to say you and I, are perhaps a part of some still other récit." Trans. Nelson 122.

Layers of life are going on all the time only sometimes we know it and most times we don't know it. Layers and layers of life like some transparent onion-like globe that has fine, transparent layer on layer (interpenetrating like water) layer on layer, circle on circle. Plato's spheres. Sometimes for a moment we realize a layer out of ourselves, in another sphere of consciousness, sometimes one layer falls and life itself, the very reality of tables and chairs becomes imbued with a quality of long-past, an epic quality so that the chair you sit in may be the very chair you drew forward when as Cambyses you consulted over the execution of your faithless servitors. (152)

So the narrating-I and the narrated-I move simultaneously on and between several layers. Levels of the real get multiplied for two reasons. One, given the genre of the *roman à clef*, some characters retain their real (extradiegetic) name, while others are given fictional names to be unlocked with the help of the key attached to the novel. Two, the narrating/narrated-I imagines the events on several discursive levels at the same time. Her Gart, being well aware of the fact that everything she does is culturally motivated, is not the least surprised when she understands that she lives the life of Astraea, while her partner, Fayne Rabb, the life of the sister of Charmides (147). As such, every (diegetic) moment of her lived life turns into the interpretive (metadiegetic) narration of this life.

This goes on in the form of endless interior monologues, the narrative mode where living one's life and narrating it coincide. The events played out at the diegetic and metadiegetic levels will then come together in a textual tapestry, a multi-dimensional one, if you will, while the truth of the fictional will have the power to turn narrated events into events that really happen—such that, as we read in the novel, "never could have happened, but [it] was true" (8). Finally, when a line from W. S. Landor is evoked in the title of the novel ("There are no fields of asphodel this side of the grave"), metalepsis will extend into the realms of life and death, with their own permeable borders, and the novel (purportedly a flower from the fields of the underworld) is offered as nourishment to long-dead actors.

I would like to bring into my discussion the other trope now, rhizome, which is, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari claim, "an acentered, nonhierarchical, non-signifying system" (23). In H. D.'s novels, the rhizome comes about, I want to suggest, as metalepses connect the different narrative layers, forming what Deleuze and Guattari call "plateaus." Rhizomatic space allows for the coexistence of many

worlds, where the actors and actants may come together in endless permutations to form the open matrix of the centerless rhizome, where no connection is privileged over any other. The rhizome is the "assemblage" (9) connecting any one point to any other point, whereby "the multiple [is] made" (7), whose fabric "is the conjunction, 'and … and … and …'" (27; ellipses in original). It is not an "arborescent systems," that is, a "hierarchical systems with centers of significance and subjectification" (18); rather, the rhizome is a map: "open and connectable in all its dimensions" (13), with "multiple entryways" (14). This is the map of thought, short-term memory, and the unconscious, "always under conditions of discontinuity, rupture and multiplicity" (17).

Indeed, in *Asphodel,* rhizome develops into a map permeating the whole novel, granting connections between layers considered discrete and separate in the dualist thinking of High Modernism. Here mythology, the dream world, and the unconscious all connect through their rhizomatic plateaus punctuating the extradiegetic and diegetic world of the novel.

> You can stand on the field and you can watch the mark your foot makes, you can see your foot ringed with blue thyme, or with cyclamen […] and you may stoop down and gather the broken cyclamen where your foot stepped and lay them at the feet of the marble Nereid […] The room of the Nereids where Darrington had sought her […] the London mist had woven a garment, a veil, the veil of Aphrodite. (136)

In this passage, blue thyme and cyclamen—as the vehicles of metalepsis—will connect in two directions: to the foot of the real person and of the museum statue, marking the two plateaus of the rhizome. Similarly, the veil and mist connect both towards London and Aphrodite. In this process, all that was performed in myths, dreams, and the unconscious will—as culturally coded performative constructions— metaleptically enter into the diegetic real. Elsewhere, the protagonist's unconscious is mapped by the plateaus occupied by the Druids, sacrificial stones, Dionysius, and the body of Christ:

> Classic images here blend with Druidical surroundings, the round stones placed in their circle of seven […] the body (obviously) of some God. Dionysius. Druid priests. Ivy. The crown of the sacrificed […] Classic images here blend with the images of Christian beauty. (153–54)

The Druids, the sacrificial stones, Dionysius, and the body of Christ seem to form an assemblage where no grouping or privileging is established either to foreground one item or to exclude another. No order is established for their connecting either; each is connectible with any other and in any permutation. Or, to take yet another example:

> And the field will trigger a whole set of rhizomatic associations: Kisses held Morgan le Fay and she was Circe, Calypso to those kisses [...] Kisses brought back people, pictures, a honey-colored Correggio nymph, the wide wings of the marble Nike [...] Ivory of small winged Erotes. Some Dionysius with a head band. The Nereids—"Do you remember those violets that you used to get me?" (195)

Here different mythological figures interact in the psyche of Morgan le Fay: Circe, Calypso, a Correggio nymph, Nike, Erotes, Dionysius, the Nereids—all of them together articulating her (diegetic) relationship with Darrington, elevating it from the unconscious to the conscious levels of understanding. While the woman establishes her multiple intersubjective connections, the unconscious is given form and language.[3]

Palimpsest is similarly organized by metalepsis and rhizome: in this case, it is what Dorrit Cohn calls internal metalepsis, the one built upon multiple embeddings (125, 126), and forming rhizomatic connections. Events take place on different temporal planes in this classroom example of intertextuality, yet still simultaneously (with the superimposition of times and spaces), thereby breaking the linearity of historical time. Violating all binary and hierarchical categories associated with patriarchal thinking, H. D. turns metalepsis into a narrative technique, as she brings together the three female questing heroes, living in three different times and places. Hipparchia in Rome in 75, B.C.; Raymonde in post-WWI London; and Helen in Egypt in 1925. The various levels get further multiplied, as the several time planes and layers of consciousness keep hiding and emerging in these interlocking palimpsests.

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[3] Let me add here that H. D. used the metaphor of the gift for female creativity: a gift one "inherits" from another level, another world (*Gift* 66). She is convinced that she received her own gift of writing by visiting parallel worlds, and it is these worlds that she owes her inspiration, during which she produces her texts in a particular trance. "[T]he writing continues to write itself or be written" (*Tribute to Freud* 51).

> Behind the Boticelli, there was another Boticelli, behind London there was another London, behind Raymonde Ransome there was (odd and slightly crude but somehow 'taking' nom-de-guerre) Ray Bart. There was Ray Bart always waiting as there was behind the autumn drift and dream anodyne of mist, another London. A London of terror and unpremeditated beauty. A London of peril and of famine and of intolerable loveliness. (104)

With earlier writings continually written over in these metonymically connected palimpsests, the rhizomatic connections are only multiplied. The metaleptic-rhizomatic palimpsest structure derives from another circumstance as well: the protagonist of each section is engaged in the writing of texts, which they inherited and which now enter into a dialogue with earlier texts: Hipparchia is engaged in finishing her dead uncle's book on botanics; the poet Raymonde hears the words of her poetic alter ego Ray Bart when writing; while Helen, who works as a "high-class secretary" to a famous archeologist, is busy transcribing the traces of a forgotten past that is being literally unearthed by the master. Very much aware of the existence of predecessors buried into the deep layers of history, consciousness, and the text, Raymonde and Helen are determined to bring to the surface these hidden, buried, suppressed pre-images of their individual and collective lives.

> She wanted to dive deep, deep, courageously down into some unexploited region of the consciousness, into some common deep sea of unrecorded knowledge and bring, triumphant, to the surface some treasure buried, lost, forgotten. (179)

These actants are certain that their lives take place in parallel worlds and texts; and so is the extradiegetic narrating-I of H. D.'s overtly autobiographical therapy notes, *Tribute to Freud*. The sessions with Freud in Vienna only strengthened her conviction that she lived in the past, present, and future simultaneously; participated in myths as much as in the physical spatial-temporal world, and enjoyed the rhizomatic assemblage whereby any point, moment, or character of any layer of consciousness could connect to any other point. It is by what Monika Fludernik calls "retrospective scene shifts" (390) that she brings forth mythology and the past, demanding that they explain the events of the present (this is what C. G. Jung and Károly Kerényi, citing Thomas Mann's essay on Freud, called a "quotation-like life" [4]). At some places, these metaleptic leaps seem to come gracefully, for example,

when associating Freud with the doctor figure in the Rembrandt once hanging in her father's Pennsylvania study (*Tribute to Freud* 34–35), or when Freud helps her to identify in his own collection that small statue H. D. once saw in a house in Cornwall (172). At other times she is afraid that metalepsis would be final and one-directional only, preventing her return to the world where her beloved ones live. This is what happens in a returning dream: she wakes up to find herself in a hotel other than where her mother and Bryher stay; moreover, she is sent away from the hotel—as well as world—where she had accidentally found herself at the start (162–63). Metalepsis structures—much like the Freudian operation of condensation—unconscious desires and memories while also displacing them onto other levels.

H. D. attached prime significance to the dualisms that surrounded her. All the major players of her life seemed to have come in twos: she had two brothers and two half-brothers; two younger sisters (both dead); two mother figures (with the two marriages of the father), and two sets of maternal grandparents. What is more important: all the real players of her life seemed to have their fictional or mythological counterparts. Sometimes the figures of these pairs change places and continue their lives in the world of their counterparts.[4] Based purely on the pun which their initials provoked, H. D. viewed D. H. Lawrence her intellectual twin brother (*Tribute* 141), while also counting twins among the Greek mythological figures, who often seemed to live each others' lives (Pallas Athené and Niké [69]). From this perspective, the primary duty of the narrating-I was to balance the twin worlds from which the pairs were taken, who constantly wanted to move into those other, parallel worlds.

> Like a juggler, she considered two regions, two shining and slippery worlds, to be balanced carefully, lest one, lest the other topple her over; she must keep suspended, she must hold balanced, two exactly shaped, exactly weighted, yet mysteriously exactly antagonistic worlds. She must keep, miraculously, by very cautious manipulation, her own balance meanwhile. (*Palimpsest* 176)

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[4]   It is in this manner that in *The Gift* her own dog trades places with the Egyptian god Ammon-Ra (25), Moses occupies the grandfather's life (27), or the twin stars of Castor and Pollux turn into the two alligators in a book (27, 40). Hilda and brother Gilbert are identified with Jack and Jill (39), while the box in the living room will turn into a veritable Pandora's box (38–39).

Twins, pairs, doubles, and other forms of twos establish, in H. D.'s fiction a relation, as Mary Jacobus claims in a different context (with reference to Freud's essay, *Delusions and Dreams*, on Jensen's novella, *Gradiva*), with the uncanny (92). If Shoshana Felman is right in interpreting the uncanny (or *unheimlich*) as "the anxiety provoked through the encounter with something which, paradoxically, is experienced as at once foreign and familiar, distant and close, totally estranged, unknown, and at the same time, strangely recognizable and known" (33), then H. D.'s doubles—presenting, through metalepsis, the Same as the Other, and the Other as the Same—surely belong to the realm of the uncanny. The feeling of *unheimlich* comes from the unpredictable connections bringing together, often in a rather random manner, players taken from different fictional worlds. Indeed, the rhizome disregards sections and levels, making for and/and connections only.

Originally she called on Freud in Vienna in 1933 because she had this choking-suffocating feeling of being trapped by the advancing war: she felt locked into a single reality, a single text. She was afraid that the nervous breakdown which World War I had brought about earlier would hit her again. She was afraid that wars had also come in pairs, and felt that she would not live through another war. She willingly entered analysis even though she knew that the "Professor" would want to dig down to the deepest layers, and the analysis which Freud refers to as when he "struck oil" (*Tribute* 93) would take her back to the years between 1914 and 1919, and make her live through her "actual personal war-shock" (93). Her "constant pre-vision of disaster" will become stronger every day; finally—after learning about the anti-Semitic incidents when a "the death-head swastika [was] chalked on the pavement, leading to the Professor's very door" (94)—they both decide not to continue with her analysis. "It is better to have an unsuccessful or 'delayed' analysis than to bring my actual terror of the lurking Nazi menace into the open" (139), she writes.

The war appears as a force which makes metaleptic-rhizomatic connections impossible: there is no way out; the voices of the unconscious, womanhood, and sexuality that had earlier been heard and been able to move about are now mute, locked into their respective worlds. Silencing both the analysand (who had so painstakingly and uncannily found metaleptic transfers between herself and other rhizomatic planes) and the female subject (who had found her voice through Freud's talking cure), the war will prevent all forms of relatedness. "The war," she writes, "its cause and effect, with its inevitable aftermath of neurotic breakdown and related nerve disorders, was driven deeper" (94).

The manly game of the war seems to lock persons into their non-connecting worlds, into the "separateness, distance, and alienation" which, as claimed in Waugh's book cited at the beginning of this essay, some male psychologists and male modernists associated with the supposedly normal differentiation of the individual ego. Resisting, however, both the war and this understanding of psychological development, H. D. produced her therapy notes out of defiance in 1944, capturing a particular analytic situation, where the voices speaking in multiple subject positions can find meeting points with players from other texts. Not letting the war triumph in silencing the analysand, she made sure that multiplicity and metalepsis would instead triumph in her text. And by writing, she created, if only decades after her death, the possibility of multiple published copies of an experience, thereby guaranteeing that the chain of relation continues.

In all her novels discussed, the female subject narrativized as multiple will retain her subject positions in diverse alliances. Coded by the cultural discourses of modernity, psychoanalysis, and feminism in particular, the tropes of metalepses and rhizome will grant an alternative construction of the alliance-based self. Metalepsis and rhizome will act as cornerstones for a rhetoric of inclusive subjectivity, psychic subjectivity, or intersubjectivity.

THE FANTASTIC AS PERFORMATIVE
Mark Twain and Ambrose Bierce Performing the Unreal

In Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* and Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," alternative realities are created solely by the power of language. The real and the unreal, whether fantastic or imagined, are intertwined and undistinguishable because both are performative constructs. Since the real is as much created as is the fantastic (as in the case of *The Mysterious Stranger*) and the fantastic is as real as the reality of here and now (as in the case of "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"), the boundaries between the real and the fantastic are regularly transgressed with ease to and fro, allowing for an ontological instability, which makes these late 19th century-early 20th century texts very modern.

Both texts are works of fantasy, satisfying the most important requirements of the genre. They both belong in the realm of the literature of the impossible, offering, as Gary Wolfe writes of the fantastic, "a clean break with reality; settings and characters may be analogous with the 'real' world, [...] but the rules that govern fantasy worlds are not necessarily consistent with our notion of reality" (72). Both are moved by what Gaston Bachelard names the "irreality function": the function that liberates the person from having to adapt ourselves to reality, from constituting ourselves as a reality" (13–14). A Tolkienian "Secondary "World" is created in both texts, complete with its own laws different from those of the real world; but inside, what is related "is 'true': it accords with the laws of that world" (37). As such, they both offer a break with the acknowledged order. In fact, such a break happens in connection with both worlds, the real and the unreal or fantastic alike, invoking, as Brian Attebery claims, "wonder by making the impossible seem familiar and the familiar new and strange" (3). This sense of wonder permeates both texts in the form of the uncertainty (Todorov 25), hesitation (Todorov 44), and astonishment (Rabkin 5) of protagonists and readers alike: the characters, as well as the reader, wonder whether the experience is caused by an illusion of the senses, or the "apparently supernatural event" (Todorov 25) is indeed happening.

Yet not only are these texts fantasies, or "game[s] of the impossible," as W. R. Irwin famously calls the fantastic (qtd. in Fredericks 37), but are language games as well, games with their own rules, accepted by all involved. As such, they exhibit traits of the performative, the type which I call logocentric or strong performative and the one I label discursive.

Logocentrism is the term which Jacques Derrida uses for the position that the stability of language—as well as systems of thought in general—rests on external anchors: the authority of the transcendental signified, "God," or the signified which pre-exists, and has an independent existence from, the signifier. Identifying logocentrism as "the exigent, powerful, systematic, and irrepressible desire for [the] signified" (*Of Grammatology* 49) permeating Western thought, Derrida claims that it posits a "necessity of relationship between [...] signifiers and signified [...] between the order of phonic signifiers and the content of the signifieds" (44). Applied to the performative, this logocentric way of thinking allows for words to indeed make present, by bringing about, the signified evoked by the performative utterance. In this case, the performative will indeed be validated from the outside: by its power to bring about "things" external to language—things "out there."

The foundational moment of logocentrism, when God creates by the *logos*, exploits performative power, the power of the word, in a rather obvious manner. Tying the signifier to the signified, the word brings about presence in the world "out there." Indeed, the narrative of origin related at the very beginning of *Genesis* abounds in instances when words make things, and saying and doing are one: "Let there be light,"[1] "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters," or "Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness" (Gen. 1:3, 6, 26). This "Ur-performative" is evoked emphatically at the beginning of the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God" (John 1: 1). Commonly referred to as word magic or the power of words, and variably termed in speech act theory as illocutionary acts (108), acts of "originary performativity" (Derrida, *Specters of Marx* 36–37), "linguistic magic" (Fotion 51), or "performative sorcery" (Loxley 51), these are cases with a strong performative force, where the word as a vehicle of creation is used to produce some new reality. Man's whole existence rests on the power of God's word: "man lives from every *word* that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD" (Deut. 8:3).

God creates the world by virtue of his own agency; as the Almighty, he is the absolute Agent or Subject, whose position in the sentence is fixed by Divine Law. This Law, conveyed in the *Decalogos* or *Decalogue* and reinscribed in subsequent laws, forbids man to refer to Him by the name or give his visual representation. When Moses asks his name, he says, "I AM WHO I AM" (Ex. 3:14) (in other translations, "I AM THAT I AM"). And when Moses rephrases his question, asking really for a nominal form to be used in the object position in a sentence, God replies, "Thus you shall

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[1] Quotations are from the *New Geneva Study Bible*.

say to the children of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you'" (Ex. 3:14). In other words, there is no way to put God in the object position: his name cannot be referred to with a nominal, only by reiterating his subjecthood or self-existence, "I AM." In this text, it is indeed, as Émile Benveniste claims of subjectivity in general, "in and through language that man constitutes himself as a *subject*, because language alone establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality, in *its* reality which is that of the being" (729; emphasis in original). God's subjectivity is truly a property of language: "'[e] go' is he who *says* 'ego'" (729; emphasis in original). In other words: God's ego comes about discursively and performatively: by uttering the performative *ego*: "I AM." This self-performing constitutes the kind of performativity different from the logocentric one: where words do not bring about things but other words, or discourse, and turn the utterer of the words into a subject with agency, who is capable of making things (if only within the realm of discourse).

Both types of performative participate in bringing about the fantastic in the two texts: the strong and the discursive types alike. What the boys experience as real in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* is created in a logocentric fashion: by word and will. As such, this text could be read as an instance of strong performativity: Satan makes clay figures, which then come to life. But by making clay figures come to life, Satan constructs himself as creator too, as an extended arm of the Almighty. Moreover, in the final twist to the story, Satan the deconstructor moves the events into mere discourse when admitting to the boys that all this is a dream. Yet here he constructs himself as an even more powerful creator and knower, an agent in the discourse of dreams.

Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" could also be read as an instance of strong performativity: Farquhar sets himself free by the power of his will. His self-construction, however, occurs in discourse as well: it is by imagining his return home that he constructs himself as a free man. In the final twist added to this story, the events are here moved into the discourse of dream as the dying man imagines his escape.

Performing cultural subjunctivity in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*

Set in Austria in 1702 and narrated by the young boy Theodor Fischer, Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger* recounts the adventures and miracles, as well as trials, of

the mysterious visit of an angel called Satan. Satan becomes the companion and idol of Theodor, provoking in the boy a passionate devotion he had not known earlier. Satan is a magical phenomenon. He seems to "prove" in so many ways that where he comes from is indeed that other world, best understood as a duplicate of this one. He tells about life in heaven in very human terms when, for example, he describes the nursery he grew up in together with the other angels. Satan gives a dramatic performance of his supernatural powers when, in order to convince the boys about the true nature of the human race, he sets up his "theatre" (137) where he shows them—"with a thought" (134)—what has happened since the Garden of Eden. "To kill," he says, "being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in its history, but only the Christian Civilization has scored a triumph to be proud of" (137). He turns lives around, but usually not for what the boys would consider the better. He makes old Wilhelm "happy" by taking his sanity away ("No sane man can be happy, for him life is real, and he sees what a fearful thing it is" [164]), while at another time he changes the "life-scheme" of their friend Fischer, whereby he will live to be ninety—except now he will go to hell, not heaven (131). Most of all, he is a man of contradictions. On the one hand, he is a Christ-like figure—he evokes the youthful Jesus of Apocrypha when making clay birds come alive (see Gibson 16) or when the crowd, which demands that Satan be killed ("Kill him, kill him!"), is pacified by the argument, "What is the use to kill the boy [...]. whatever power he has, he gets from his master" (295). On the other hand, he conveys the darkest vision possible of the pitiful, limited, trivial human race. He compares the difference between the human being and himself to the "difference between a drop of water and the sea, a rushlight and the sun, the difference between the infinitely trivial and the infinitely sublime!" (319). This difference, he insists, results from the fact that only the race he belongs to is capable of truly creating something out of nothing—out of thought. By the performative power of *logos*, that is.

> With my race it is different; we have no limits of any kind, we comprehend all things [...] A man *originates* nothing in his head, he merely observes exterior things, and *combines* them in his head—puts several observed things together and draws a conclusion. His mind is merely a machine, that is all [...] a man's mind cannot *create*—a god's can, and my race can. This is the difference. *We* need no contributed materials, we *create* them—out of thought. All things that exist were made out of thought—and out of nothing else. (331–33; emphasis in original)

Satan gives ample demonstrations of his the illocutionary force of his strong performative: he reads people's minds, controls their will, performs miracles of all kinds, becomes visible or invisible as he pleases (and allows the boys to borrow these powers for some time, too), can thin out like a soap bubble and vanish, makes Duplicates of everyone in the town, and gives illustrated history, psychology, and theology lessons to his friend. Some of these tricks enchant Theodor, while others overpower him with utter gloom. Such is, for example, the Assembly of the Dead, which Theodor watches for hours and hours in darkness and empty silence, "as if the world was holding its breath" (401).

This text is a virtuoso performance of boundary crossings; the characters move easily between worlds, events, and people, created or brought about purely by the power of will and word. As a portal-quest fantasy, to apply Farah Mendelsohn's typology (2 ff.), this piece of short fiction abides by several basic principles of the sub-genre. First, not only is it about transition, but it incorporates two transitions: the first into the world narrated and constructed by Satan, the second into the non-world he presents with the final dénouement. Both transitions are characterized by the denial of "the taken for granted," the positioning of "both protagonist and reader as naïve," and the reliance on a "moral universe" (2, 5). As a reversed traveler's tale, it presents a situation where it is not the protagonist who travels but a traveler arrives to where the protagonist is, who spends time with the protagonist(s). As such, it is a club narrative, complete with an "uninterruptable and incontestable" storyteller (6) in the "role of sage, magician, or guide" (5 ff) and a group of isolated listeners who construct "fantasyland" by accepting what they hear as "received truth" (7). It has two clearly identifiable narrators, Theodor and Satan, where the former is "the narrator of the microcosm (the world within a world)," or the "point of view character," while the latter is the "narrator of the macrocosm, [...] who 'stories' the world for us" with "fragments of prophecy" (8).

The narrated events contradict the "ground rules" (Rabkin 7) of the extra-textual world in that angels do not come for leisurely visits to Earth, they do not entertain young boys by showing their tricks, and they are not really called Satan. Here the perspective informed by these ground rules is turned around, reversed, provoking amazement and wonder in the boys. Yet they see no problem accepting the existence of supernatural forces—indeed, they rather see their abstract religious knowledge put into practice by the visitor.

The hesitation which, according to Todorov, "sustains [the] life" of the fantastic (Todorov 31) comes later only, when Satan reveals that all he said earlier is

untrue and that all is but a dream. This is the uncanny turn in the story (of "the supernatural explained" [Todorov 41]), where the illocutionary act turns into perlocutionary, provoking hesitation and even astonishment in both character and reader. Not only is it, to use Rabkin's terminology, "not-expected" or "dis-expected," but actually, indeed, "anti-expected" (8–10), which is the true marker of the fantastic. This reversal is structural in the sense that here it is perspective that changes: not only are the boys' (religious) beliefs shaken, but their whole existence is doubted. In other words, Satan's reversal of perspective brings about not only an epistemological but an ontological uncertainty. As he tells the boys when saying goodbye,

> *"Life itself is only a vision, a dream."*
> *"Nothing* exists; all is a dream. God—man—the world—the sun, the moon, the wilderness of stars—a dream, all a dream; they have no existence. *Nothing exists save empty space—and you!"*
> "And you are not you—you have no body, no blood, no bones, you are but a *thought.* I myself have no existence, I am but a dream—your dream, creature of your imagination. (403–405)

This is the uncanny "conclusion" to the book, whereby Twain performs the double gesture of withdrawing both the certainty of this world and the promise of the other. Nothing can be taken for granted, even though both worlds were shown to and ascertained by the senses—"no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell" (405).

Satan acts in the spirit of what is known in philosophy as "Moore's paradox," when, after making a most credible reality for the boy, he withdraws his own belief in it. After the model of the paradox described by the English philosopher G. E. Moore, "The cat is on the mat but I do not believe it is" (qtd. in Loxley 36), Satan could be saying, "I have created a world for you, my friends, using my powers as a supernatural being, but I do not believe I have it, or that it is a world, or indeed that I am a supernatural being." In the game of make-believe, he first suspends the "as if" of imagination, only to more shockingly re-impose it in the conclusion of the story. With this gesture of Satan, Mark Twain recalls the waving and then breaking of the wand of another grand magician, Shakespeare, through Prospero in *The Tempest*, saying:

Our revels are now ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with sleep. (IV, 1)

The revels are ended for Twain too; his actors were also all spirits, who melted into thin air. Life here too is "rounded with sleep."

Satan is, then, engaged in the "as if" language game of imagining and pretending, a game, to use Victor Turner's phrase, of the "subjunctive mood," concerned with "wish, desire, possibility or hypothesis" (*From Ritual to Theatre* 83) Indeed, he presents a vision best captured as subjunctive cultural performance that toys with the possibility of alternative worlds created by performative powers. The function of his performance, as is the function of all performances of cultural subjunctivity according to Turner, is to provide the individuals "with passage from one basic human state or status [...] to another" ("Liminality and the Performative Genres" 21). Satan's liminal game of make-believe does this crossing of thresholds twice, actually: first when the border between natural and supernatural dimensions is crossed (when little people are created, for example) and second when the reality of the real is questioned at the end.

According to Mark Twain's conclusion, then, the two worlds are alike in being equally dreamed, imagined, or, we could say, performatively constructed: what was considered real also belongs to the unreal. Linguistically and philosophically, they show little difference: reference is such that language does not differentiate between the real and the unreal.

It is here that Twain abandons the strong performative as an illocutionary act, trading it for the perlocutionary act of bringing about amazement, wonder, and shock. This shock comes from the recognition that humankind is locked into a discourse, the discourse of dream. As such, this type of performativity is discursive, where words will only make texts or other discursive worlds.

For up to this point, the real and the unreal are positioned as polar opposites, making the transfer from one to the other through metalepsis. But this seeming metalepsis will turn out to be intertextual: the shift between two textual worlds. As a particular case of intertextuality, both worlds prove to be fictional and textual; thus the metaleptic leap that the boys believe they can take will be no more than an intertextual leap from one to another fictional world. Ultimately, reality loses its ontological grounding: it turns out that it is this physical world that does not exist, or rather that it has been swallowed by or collapsed into the constructed-performed world of dream and imagination.

Rorty's test concerning the ability of being referred to (*Consequences of Pragmatism* 117) can be performed on both the real world and the unreal: the world discursively constructed from thought and language. Although the world created by a fictional character, by Satan/Satan in this instance, is at least two removes away from the reader's immediate reality; claims about all three levels can be equally "true." To the skeptic's question posed by Rorty—"how would it be different if everything were a dream? How would it be different if it were all made up? How would it be different if there were nothing there to be represented?" (129)—Mark Twain gives an answer much like Rorty: it would not be (is not) different. Truth is discursively constructed, constructed in language and by language ("truth cannot be out there" [5]): "whether a sentence has sense," Rorty claims, "*may* be dependent upon whether another sentence is true" (129). In other words, truth is not validated by external reality—for, indeed, there is nothing outside the text. Only the text exists for Twain too: the creative faculty, the dream ("and you the maker of it" [405]). Hence the imperative: "Dream other dreams, and better!" (404).

While the claim that the mind makes the real is wholly familiar in the symbolist tradition, here in *The Mysterious Stranger* it is not a poetic artifact that the mind makes, but reality itself. Yet this is a reality within the mind, a reality that is part of the mind, or, as J. Hillis Miller puts it in connection with Wallace Stevens, a reality which is "the figment of the mind" (*Poets of Reality* 256). Discursive performativity functions within the mind, bringing about such figments that give the illusion of reality only, but are actually unreal.

The unreality of death performed in Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge"

Bierce's most popular piece, the Civil War story written in 1891, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," presents elaborate boundary crossings between the "reality" of the fictional characters and the imagined world of the protagonist, now two removes away from what Rorty calls our "plain ordinary spatio-temporal existence" (*Consequences of Pragmatism* 118). Here borders between lived and imagined, outer and inner are repeatedly transgressed, while internal monologue is presented as the narration of external events. I see the piece as a special case of descriptive pause, where the object of description is purely internal. As the portrayal of a dying man's last moments, it is also an early example of psychological realism, offering, unbeknownst to the reader until the very end, a narrative transition between life and death. In addition, it can be considered a critique of gendered and racialized cultural spheres.

An Alabama planter who is a civilian at war-time, Peyton Farquhar lives between the social spheres of the war and women of the home; but his in-betweenness ends as he becomes feminized when approaching the home through fantasy and imagination. Moreover, his last moments are extended into an elaborate escape narrative reversing the traditional racialized roles of master and slave. Running for his life, Farquhar, the Southern white planter, is now put into the position of the black slave, going through the same experience as the escaping slaves. First he falls victim to the scheming of the Northern scout, later he is hunted down—if only in his imagination—by the enemy: in both cases he is made into an object whose body is foregrounded. In between these two series of objectification and corporealization, he makes himself into a subject who takes control—if only, again, in his imagination.

Depicting his last moments while being executed by the Yankees, the narrative follows Farquhar's imaginary escape and return home, to his wife and plantation, with moments of pain and suffering finally leading to a few idyllic moments, which abruptly end in death. The story is a feat of fantasy fiction, presenting both the real of the fictional narrative and the level above this fantasized reality in naturalistic detail.

As an immersive fantasy, to apply Mendelsohn's typology again (59 ff.), Bierce's story also "presents the fantastic without comment as the norm for both the protagonist and for the reader: we sit on the protagonist's shoulder, and while we have access to his eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative" (xx).

Mendelsohn calls this feature of the immersive fantasy "syntactic bootstrapping," the "reversal of information feed—show first, tell later" (83). We find here an "irony of mimesis," where the fantasy is "sealed": "it cannot, within the confines of the story, be questioned" (xx). In this fantasy world, "no magic occurs" (xxi), for "once the fantasy becomes assumed, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own" (xx). The extended world built in an immersive fantasy is therefore totally plausible, livable, taken for granted, one whose fantastic quality is achieved through perspective. "The point of world-building is to create something that can be existed in," Mendelsohn writes (71).

Bierce proves himself a true naturalist in his very matter-of-fact description of the scene of execution, describing the preparations and the whole machinery of war in a detached voice.

> A man stood upon a railroad bridge in northern Alabama, looking down into the swift water twenty feet below. The man's hands were behind his back, the wrists bound with a cord. A rope closely encircled his neck. It was attached to a stout cross-timber above his head and the slack fell to the level of his knees. Some loose boards laid upon the sleepers supporting the metals of the railway supplied a footing for him and his executioners—two private soldiers of the Federal army, directed by a sergeant who in civil life may have been a deputy sheriff. (33)

The man "engaged in being hanged," the corporealized patient suffering these preparations, is the object of narrative as well as visual attention; the narrative voice shows no emotions, only admits that the man did not look like a villain:

> He wore a mustache and pointed beard, but no whiskers; his eyes were large and dark gray, and had a kindly expression which one would hardly have expected in one whose neck was in the hemp. Evidently this was no vulgar assassin. (34)

Turning to the man to be executed, the narration ceases to focus on external events but enters the mind of the protagonist. This is the moment when—we recognize later—the real is replaced by the unreal. We follow Farquhar's gaze from his seeing position wandering "to the swirling water of the stream," the "piece of dancing driftwood [that] caught his attention," and finally to his thoughts fixed upon his wife and children (34). Indeed, this is where the real story begins, after the sergeant

steps aside—and after the last detour giving the reader the background of how Farquhar was tricked by the Northern scout.

In section III, we are finally taken inside Farquhar's mind, and death will be portrayed as a spiritual process, a movement in time in several stages. Slowly he will gain control to set himself free and get away from the scene of execution. His power of thought is restored. Farquhar is able to give meaning to what he feels. Perception is becoming inner, registering psychological processes. This is followed by having first his vision restored and then coming into a full possession of his senses. Now, as one of the finest passages indicates, his perception is heightened.

> He felt the ripples upon his face and heard their separate sounds as they struck. He looked at the forest on the bank of the stream, saw the individual trees, the leaves and the veining of each leaf—saw the very insects upon them: the locusts, the brilliant-bodied flies, the grey spiders stretching their webs from twig to twig. He noted the prismatic colors in all the dewdrops upon a million blades of grass […] A fish slid along beneath his eyes and he heard the rush of its body parting the water. (37–38)

He notices the soldiers who, from his perspective, look grotesque. Efforts are multiplied on both sides: he sees and feels everything better as they start shooting at him. Finally, he manages to escape, thrown out of the stream by a vortex. Taking in all the physical sensations around him, and weeping in delight, he feels as if he was born again—probably into another world where a "strange, roseate light" shone through the trees "and the wind made in their branches the music of Æolian harps" (39). Now he springs to his feet, and his last moments before death follow the trajectory of an escape narrative, except here it is the white planter who is being hunted, not the slave. In addition, his desire for the home seems to act as a marker of femininity, appropriated by the man seeking refuge in the feminine sphere. In the final stage of his flight, after crossing all the possible boundaries—social, psychological, historical, as well as those of gender and race—the inner and the outer suddenly coincide as his neck is broken and he dies.

Two parallel worlds are presented here: the possible world, in which the hero is hanged, and the impossible, into which he escapes through the illocutionary force of the strong performative. The unreal looks as real as the former, with its very ordinary physical location where extraordinary things happen to the hero. Moreover, this world exhibits a high degree of consistency, thus satisfying the requirement of the fantastic posed by Attebery: "reader and writer are committed to maintaining the illusion for

the entire course of the fiction" (2). Yet this commitment cannot be interpreted as Tolkien's "Secondary Belief" (37), for the reader does not yet know that the narrative world is not the primary world actually experienced by the protagonist. This secondary world looks so true that, as Tolkien claims, "it accords with the laws of that [primary] world. You, therefore, believe it, while you are, as it were, inside" (37). These two worlds clash because the former is the real, while the latter is the unreal or imagined. However, not even in the latter world do the related events contradict the laws of nature; here "the laws of reality remain intact and permit an explanation of the phenomena described," as Todorov defines the genre of the uncanny (41).

Until the very end, the reader cannot doubt the truthfulness of the escape narrative; the reader can have no idea that the narration has departed from reality and dived into the mind of the man, since the very same techniques are used for depicting the imagined as for the real. Uncertainty emerges in the reader only because, as the story progresses, certain signals point to the fantastic improbability of the escape narrative. Everything is possible in this world: ducking bullets, diving into a deep river from the gallows, freeing hands and feet from a deadly rope, swimming with fish. This is indeed a world into which heroes of the fantastic want to escape: a world which Rabkin defines as having "no entanglements" (49). Slowly, "from some affective apprehension of the impossible," as Wolfe puts it (71), or the perlocutionary force of the performative, the reader realizes that we are in the realm of the fantastic, or the realm of the imagination, as brought about performatively.

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In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that both texts exhibit both versions of performativity: the logocentric or strong performative, on the one hand, and the discursive performative, on the other. Without the surprise twist concluding both stories, both could be read simply as instances of strong performativity: Satan makes clay figures which then come to life, while Farquhar sets himself free by the power of his will. But in the final twist to the Twain piece, when he admits to the boys that all this is a dream, Satan the deconstructor moves the events into mere discourse; at the same time, he constructs himself as a powerful creator of discourse, who is capable of controlling dreams even. In the final twist added to the Bierce story, as Farquhar dies, the events are here too moved into the discourse of dream as the dying man constructs himself into a living man. Recognition is indeed shocking in both cases, and the main reason for this shock lies in the ways these authors play with performativity.

MAKING THE SUBJECT
Performative Genders in Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café*
and David Hwang's *M. Butterfly*

The performative has proved to be one of the most energizing concepts in contemporary theories of culture and literature. Contesting the primacy of the signified over the signifier, the performative has come to be understood as a function of the signifier only, accounting for such textual processes as the performative construction of the subject and the performativity of writing and reading. As such, it has provided a pragmatic form whereby certain constitutive processes can be conceptualized in non-essentialist thinking. To take the example of identities, the performative refutes the essentialist position by showcasing gender, sexuality, or race as produced by language. Independent of whether the identities in question are stable or unstable, unproblematic or problematic, intelligible or unintelligible, dominant or non-dominant, the performative establishes the ways they all come about as effects of discourse. Moreover, inflections of gender, race, or sexual identity will be shown to exist only in the symbolic: as metaphors or catachreses but not as referents.

Developed originally by J. L. Austin within the framework of ordinary language philosophy *(How To Do Things With Words)*, the performative has been picked up by philosophers and theorists in the 1970s and especially 1980s and 1990s. Radical thinkers used speech act theory in support of their critique of metaphysics; among these, Jacques Derrida ("Signature Event Context"; *Limited Inc*; *Specters of Marx*; "Performative Powerlessness"; *Negotiations*), Roland Barthes ("The Death of the Author"), Stanley Fish (*Is There a Text in This Class?*, "Speech-Act Theory, Literary Criticism, and *Coriolanus*"), Shoshana Felman *(The Scandal of the Speaking Body; Claims of Literature)*, and J. Hillis Miller *(Versions of Pygmalion; Tropes, Parables, Performatives; Speech Acts in Literature; On Literature; Literature as Conduct)*. At the same time, feminist critics put the performative in the middle of their constructionist work on subjectivity, especially gender, sexual, and racial identity; among them, Diana Fuss *(Essentially Speaking)*, Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble*; "For a Careful Reading"; *Excitable Speech*; *The Psychic Life of Power*; *Undoing Gender*), and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick *(The Epistemology of the Closet; Touching Feeling)*. A speech act perspective on the subject allows one to see subjectivities as "large" and multitudinous in the Whitmanesque way, as something that is constantly made and remade, the product of language processes, therefore multiform, variable, and permeable.

The performative in the poststructuralist framework grants a conceptional tool for understanding the subject as a discursive construct, a function of the signifier that does not lean on a fixed and independent signified. Moreover, speech act theory allows one to trace the process of the production of both marked and unmarked elements of dichotomies such as woman/man, black/white, homosexual/heterosexual.

Subjectivity theories – a brief overview

Subjectivity, *subject*, *identity* – these terms evoke issues that have defined theories of culture and society of the past decades. In critical parlance, *identity* and *subject/subjectivity* are used as near-synonyms, often as interchangeable terms. In my understanding, however, there is a difference, lying in historical context, part/whole relationship, degree of consciousness, and degree of fluidity/fixity. First, *identity*—referring to some core and stable element of the self – is part of modernist discourse, while *subject/subjectivity*—referring to variable and permeable entities produced in discourse – is part of poststructuralist- postmodern critical discourse. Second, *identity* refers more to social markers, or separate segments of one's self, that can be shown to correspond to various social categories (such as gender, race, class, sexuality) which one as *subject* or one's *subjectivity* as a whole is made up of. Accordingly, *identity* is often defined by only one specific inflection (this is what Anthony Appiah and Amy Guttman call the "imperialism of identity" [*Color Conscious* 103]), while *subjectivity* is used as incorporating multiple identifications or, as Nick Mansfield puts it, as an "abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves" (3). Third, the difference between the two terms should be searched in the degree of consciousness as well. Subjectivity implies a higher degree of self-awareness, where the subject is constituted as an object, the object of study, for himself/herself. This is the sense in which Foucault uses the term as well when speaking of the "domain of possible knowledge" resulting from observing the ways "in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself" (*Aesthetics* 461). Fourth, as opposed to fixed (albeit evolving) identity markers, subjectivity is a shifting-moving process, a set of positions inscribed and reinscribed by discourse.

The poststructuralist theories contest the subject as signified, one pre-existing construction or existing independently of language. Until it got contested in the second part of the 20th century, this autonomous and self-conscious individual

– conceptualized during the early modern era and dramatized, for example, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as the self-reflective modern man thinking his way into action and agency – served as an axiom of Western thought. Indeed, the concept goes back to René Descartes' *cogito*, the "I think, therefore I am" maxim of thinking and doubting and struggling to know that is taken as the basis of being. The Cartesian self conceptualized during the Enlightenment was further developed in the 18th century, with Jean-Jacques Rousseau's insistence on the autonomy of individual experience, John Locke's emphasis on rational control, Benjamin Franklin's trust in the (self-)perfectibility of man, and Immanuel Kant's concept of rational agency and unity of the self, among others. In the 19th century, such equations between rational thinking and "humanity" will serve as the basis for the spectacular exclusions of blacks and women from the "universal" idea of the human, giving an impetus, in the United States, to the anti-slavery movement and, in Europe and the U.S., to suffragette action. Justifications for these latter will include arguments – coming from Frederick Douglass and Margaret Fuller, for example – assigning the faculties of the self to those formerly excluded. The control of the self is newly problematized in Friedrich Nietzsche, allowing the idea of self-construction to enter his philosophical system. Critiquing the Cartesian unified consciousness, Sigmund Freud's modern psychology assumes a subjectivity which, though split and therefore not in our full control, relies on self-knowledge and grants a certain degree of agency. Jacques Lacan's approach will take a shift from the ruling Freudian model in acknowledging the separation of the desire for control over selfhood from the illusion of such control, or, in the mirror stage, the child's recognition of the distinction between self and other, as well as between the visual gestalt of the complete external image and the child's sense of its own fragmented self. With Lacan's linguistic turn – insisting that the subject is always the speaking subject, one defined in and by language, and that language is the site where self-identity happens – the idea of the self-existing Cartesian subject suffered a serious blow.

But psychoanalysis was not the only discipline that critiqued the modern idea of subjectivity and agency: linguists, philosophers, semioticians, literary and cultural theorists such as Émile Benveniste, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Teresa de Lauretis, Julia Kristeva, and Judith Butler, for example, have shared a similar insistence on how language/ideology/power/knowledge/social technologies/the abject/the Other construct us, by signification/interpellation/ subjection, into subjects that are never free, unified, or an origin. Underlying these various claims, which I will summarize briefly in the next paragraph, is the recognition of

the double meaning of the word *subject*, referring both to the process of becoming a subject of a linguistic occasion (the subject *of* the sentence, the one assuming the speaking position) and to the process of becoming subordinating, subjected, *to* some power or force or system. This subjectivation – of being produced and subjugated at the same time – is captured by Foucault's term *assujettissement*, which denotes both the process of becoming a linguistic subject and the process of assuming agency through processes of subjugation, "which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate out behaviors," where subjects are gradually constituted "through a multiplicity of organisms, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc.," and "subjection in its material instance" is the "constitution of subjects" (*Power/Knowledge* 97). Subjects are, therefore, produced by power. Applying this claim to the gender component of subjectivity, one could say that only by being subjected to the juridical norms of manhood/womanhood does one have culturally intelligible gender. As Foucault puts it in connection with sexuality,

> sexuality owes its very definition to the action of the law: not only will you submit your sexuality to the law, but you will have no sexuality excerpt by subjecting yourself to the law. (*History* 128)

The brief overview of subjectivity theories dislodging the *cogito* should start with Benveniste, who emphasized the primacy of language in providing the possibility of subjectivity: it is in the sentence that the 'I' constitutes itself as subject: "the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language" (226). For Derrida, one becomes a subject only by being subjected to the signifying practices of language: "the subject (self-identical or even conscious of self-identity, self-conscious) is inscribed in the language, [...] he is a 'function' of the language. He becomes a *speaking* subject only by conforming his speech [...] to the system of linguistic prescriptions taken as the system of differences, or at least to the general law of différance" ("Différance" 396). For Althusser, it is primarily apparatuses such as literature and institutions such as the church, family, and school that reproduce the values of ideology which will "interpellate" or hail the individual – with the power of force similar to that of the police; it is this hailing by which the interpellated person becomes a socially constituted subject (*Lenin*). For Foucault, power is enhanced by knowledge in bringing about a maximum effect on the individual, the individual being "one of [power's] prime effects" (*Power/Knowledge* 98) – such is the function of the prison, as well as hospitals, schools, or banks: to individualize, normalize, and hierarchize the subject

(*Discipline*), or to regulate sexual practices by various technologies of sex (*History*). De Lauretis applied Foucault's idea of complex political technologies to gender and suggested to include such "social technologies" as cinema, institutionalized discourses, as well as practices of daily life, thus defining gender as both the product and process of its representation and self-representation (*Technology*). For Kristeva, the subject is formed from a defensive position during the process of attempting to establish a dividing line between self and Other by constantly pushing away those forces threatening its borders, which she calls abject – such as the maternal body or corporeal waste (*Powers*). As poststructuralist commentaries deconstructed the distinction between preexisting and constructed subjectivities, and insisted that the subject was always already constructed as a function or effect of power and its discourses, Butler applied this deconstructive gesture to the sex/gender (or nature/culture) binary, pointing out that "sex" is not a biological given but "is as culturally constructed as gender"; therefore, it is "always already gender" (*Gender Trouble* 7) and the body ("nature") is "always already a cultural sign" (71). Moreover, not only does gender come first, but there is nothing beneath the mask of regulatory behavior affected by society: gender is performative. "That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality" (*Gender Trouble* 136).

Thus predicated on the notions of construction and performative process, the subject in poststructuralist-postmodern theories is anchored in language and is viewed as a function of the sentence. Language can be performative without employing performative verbs; indeed, as Butler claims, "it's most performative when its performativity is least explicit [...] most of all when it isn't even embodied in actual words" (qtd in Sedgwick, *Touching* 6). Moreover, performativity is really an effect of language, not its cause. As Roland Barthes famously claims in his "The Death of the Author,"

> Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance of writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance of saying *I*: language knows a "subject," not a "person," and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language "hold together," suffices, that is to say, to exhaust it. (1467)

Indeed, as poststructuralism calls into question language or the text as a transparent medium, "revealing" a reality behind it, the subject or self that pre-exists the

text (or can have an existence outside the realm of language) is concomitantly repudiated. Poststructuralist theorists will not insist on a solipsistic existence similar to Forty-four's in Mark Twain's *The Mysterious Stranger*, for example; the movement away from the referent does not imply a denial of the referent. What is asserted by poststructuralism, however, is that this referent cannot exist as self-presence: all our experience is mediated by the signifying practices of culture, or, in fact, is constructed through discourse. Of course, people do exist even before they speak, even before they construct themselves as subjects in discourse. But their existence as subjects depends on how they speak, how they construct themselves in language; the self as a system of representations evolves out of the text. For example, when in July 1862, Emily Dickinson sends her fourth letter to T. W. Higginson, saying, "I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur – and my Eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves" (Letter 268), she is (she constructs herself as) – at least as far as the meaning of her words are concerned – no more than a small wren-like woman, with bold hair and brown eyes. Or, to take another example, she might be all kinds of other things too, but when in 1864 she complains to her sister Lavinia, "I have been sick so long I do not know the sun" (Letter 435), she constitutes herself solely as the subject of the sentence, the figure saying "I," and illness will emerge as the exclusive marker of her subjectivity. Subjected to the meanings produced by the sentence, or subjected to discourse, the speaker's subjectivity is purely textual; as a subject, she is "never more than the instance of writing," as Barthes put it in the passage quoted earlier: the figure produced by the subject of the sentence. The subject of her sentence takes the subject-position defined solely by what is being narrated in the text. Therefore, the conclusion is at hand: subjectivity is narrative, something that can be related in a coherent narrative. "Self-creation," which Rorty – following Nietzsche – equates with self-knowledge (*Contingency* 27), can only happen via narration, via narrating oneself in one's own terms.

Performing subjectivity

Subjectivity can be said to come about in two distinct ways performatively: revealing an existing (discursive) reality and creating a new (discursive) ontology, reflecting or quoting prior texts and processes, and bringing about new texts and processes. The first is representation, the dramatic or theatrical replaying of some existing

social script; the second is the (discursive) ontologization of some newly performed entity.

I use the term *performance* for instances where expressive citationality is dominant in making subjectivities; these processes appeal to existing conventions and invoke existing traditions. Such instances of subjectivity performances indeed express some pre-existing identity conventions and reproduce ruling ideologies to which society has subjected the subject. This is the theatrical version of the performative, when an existing script is being acted out on the stage, gets to be replayed, so to say. These performances are expressive, but what they express is not some ontological "essence" seated in the body and then given expression by clothes, behavioral styles, or ways of thinking. Instead, performance is expressive of the conventions, discourses that have produced, say, gender. This is, indeed, as Butler puts it in connection with the imitative structure of gender, "an imitation without an origin" (*Gender Trouble* 138). What precedes the performance of identity, then, is not some originary essence but the set of norms and traditions that have produced those particular identities and that will be reiterated. Such performances are generated in processes much like Althusserian interpellation: when the subject is produced by being "interpellated" by some powerful ideology; somewhat like responding to the "hey, you" call of the policeman, the person's identity of being performatively produced as the addressee, the "you," of the call. All the while, the subject holds on to the illusion of freedom, the illusion of "submitting freely" to ideology – quite like John Winthrop insisted, according to Linda K. Kerber, that the colonists follow the model of women in marriage when submitting "freely" to the state ("Can a Woman").

Of course, theatricality – or the repetition of certain formulae and scripts (such as "I pronounce you man and wife," "We declare independence") – is very much part of this expressive-replaying performance. But such a dramatic performance goes beyond the "inbuilt theatricality" (Winspur 177) of the performative: here, in instances of subjectivity performances, for example, it is not just formulae that are being cited, but whole contexts – of patriarchy, racism, homophobia, among others – can act as normative scripts that regulate behavior. The context of performance is permeated – or, to use Derrida's term, saturated ("Signature" 174) – by conventions and ideologies. In this sense, all such performances are versions of the masquerade, or the interaction of mask, costume, and convention described by Joan Rivière as early as 1929 in connection with gender; in this vein, womanliness is nothing more than its playing out, or masquerade (38). These instances of dramatic performance

as the citing and playing out of scripts are all "parasitic," in the Derridian sense, leaning on existing norms and taking off from earlier performances.

My ontological or radical *performative* is quite different. Here new discursive entities come about against or in the absence of existing conventions. Therefore, the subjectivities performed will be multiple, unfixed, unstable, and mobile, and mutable —much like the "new *mestiza* consciousness" described by Gloria Anzaldúa (99–113)— allowing for a new possibility of agency. If performance was described as expressive, one that reproduces the ruling ideology, the performative, indeed, challenges the ruling ideology. When subjectivities are being performatively constructed, for example, figurations of new subjectivity will come about, typically involving the transgressions and extensions of categories. For example, the formerly disempowered will assume agency by resisting normativity and undermining the individualizing-normalizing-hierarchizing effect of power. In such cases, the subject does not come about via being interpellated by ideology, but instead by resisting this interpellation and resisting the normative codes of thought and behavior—by enacting a rupture from convention. Indeed, the difference lies, as Butler points out, in being acted upon as opposed to being, in the case of the ontological performative, enacted by: "[p]ower not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being" (*Psychic* 13). This new discursive ontology corresponds to Derrida's new kind of performative: "the originary performativity that does not conform to preexisting conventions, unlike all the performatives analyzed by the theoreticians of speech acts, but whose force of *rupture* produces the institution or the constitution, the law itself, which is to say also the meaning that appears to, that ought to, or that appears to have to guarantee it in return" (*Specters* 36–37). For example, *The Declaration of Independence* is such an originary performative in that the signatories broke existing laws and instead created the law by which they acted and created themselves and those on whose behalf they acted (the American people). Such a radical performative has a radically inaugural quality because, as Hillis Miller explains, here "each performative utterance to some degree creates its own conditions and laws. It transforms the context into which it enters" (*Speech Acts* 96).

As all performatives, this category also relies on repetition, quotation, or citation, only this is a special case of repetition, quotation, or citation: this is quoting with a difference, discarding the previously coded script, ignoring the pre-established formulae, and replacing the earlier context with a new one. Subjectivity, especially agency, happens when the person is capable of quoting with a difference, when the speaker is allowed self-construction without or in spite of existing conventions.

This is the moment in which," as Butler puts it, "a subject – a person, a collective – asserts a right or entitlement to a livable life when no such prior authorization exists, when no clearly enabling convention is in place" (Butler, *Undoing* 224). This is the possibility of agency acceptable for postmodern theories as well, captured by Butler's phrase quoted earlier, "the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power" (*Psychic Life* 15). This radical performative grows out of a context that is "never absolutely determinable" (Derrida, "Signature" 174); this context is indeterminable because it is, to use another Derridian word, "non-saturated," or not entirely saturated ("Signature" 174); in fact, it is born as a response to the *performance* engendered by a fully saturated context.

Gender performativity in the text

In the following, I discuss two texts of gender performativity: Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* as an instance of the ontological *performative*, where gender is shown to be changing as well as relative, and David Hwang's *M. Butterfly* as an instance of gender *performance*, where scripts of womanhood, as well as Orientalism, are replayed – albeit with a difference.

Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943) presents a complex case of gender performativity: here gender appears as fluid and mutable, multiple and transgressive, and in each case, it is sexually negotiated, thereby dependent on the particular relationship and situation in which in it is performed. Gender is only evoked here, as a relative term, as only one construction interlocking with and dependent upon projections of sexuality and power. This piece of short fiction serves as a laboratory for the hierarchical structure of heterosexuality where, as Catharine McKinnon observes, "[g]ender emerges as the congealed form of the sexualization of inequality between men and women" (*Feminism Unmodified* 7). Formed, in each case, intersectionally out of a space of ambivalence which opens up differently in the three nexus relationships, gender has only vague suggestions of femininity and masculinity. Assigning feminine traits to the desired object and masculine traits to the desiring subject is really just an easy translation of the object-subject dynamics and of the perception of relationships between unequal partners. With the three main players taking different gender and sexual positions in each of the three combinations, both gender and sexuality emerge as relative terms, critiquing gender and sexual essentialisms.

The story centers on Miss Amelia Evans, a peculiar woman in her thirties, who – by her mere presence and then later by running a café in the small Southern town – brings life to the dreary place. She is a "manly" woman, brought up by her father as a boy, inheriting his wealth too. She is a hard worker, skilled in farming, carpentering, and other jobs fit for men; she operates a still in the swamp and serves liquor from her own house to men (the only people she associates with) in the evenings. Defying all physiological and social norms of womanhood, she is built like a man, "somewhat queer of face" (206), with a height "not natural for a woman," and is dressed in overalls and gumboots.

> She was a dark, tall woman, with bones and muscles like a man. Her hair was cult short and brushed back from the forehead, and there was about her sunburned face a tense, haggard quality. She might have been a handsome woman is, even then, she was not slightly cross-eyed. (198)

Not only does she not have a woman's looks in terms of her body and way of dressing, but even when she puts on a dress, as she does on Sundays, "that hung on her in a most peculiar fashion" (214). In other words, hers is not a "docile body," in the Foucauldian sense, a "subjected and practiced" body produced by discipline (*Discipline* 138) and converted by techniques of gender stylization. In her case, Virginia Woolf's contention about dresses wearing us seems to be refuted. (Unlike another "manly woman," March in D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox*, a comparable story of shifting gender and sexual identities, who at one point starts wearing a green silk dress, and shocks her lover Henry by her newly proclaimed femininity.) Amelia has habits that are "manly" too, like tightening her first every now and then, especially after meals, to feel her muscles; or sitting with both elbows on the table and knees spread wide apart. Her manliness shows especially in the lack of interest in men: she "cared nothing for the love men" (198). A lonesome person, she lives alone for all her life, except for the time of her "queer marriage" at the age of nineteen to the dandy of the town, Marvin Macy; but this too only lasted for ten days and, as we learn later, does not get consummated. Her life changes drastically; however, with the arrival of Lymon Willis, her second cousin: Cousin Lymon, a hunchback only half Miss Amelia's height, is taken in by her, to be treated with fostering devotion by the woman. Already the first night, their attachment seems complete: walking up the staircase, the odd couple throw "one great, twisted shadow" on the wall behind them (204).

This is the first relationship that gets heterosexualized in the story. More and more, the woman takes the place of the wooing (male) lover: in her eyes "fastened lonesomely on the hunchback," there is a mixture of "pain, perplexity, and uncertain joy" in her expression, while her hands are often sweating (213). Their respective masculinization and feminization affect even their manners of speech: while Amelia likes to talk about interminable, abstract subjects like "the stars, the reason why Negroes are black, the best treatment for cancer," Lyman is a "great chatterer," who likes to "interrupt her suddenly to pick up, magpie fashion," some concrete, unimportant detail (224). Soon enough, he becomes an accomplished performer of (Southern) womanhood. Not only is he feminized in the position of the kept woman, but gets spoilt "to a point beyond reason" (214) by being presented with a piano, a car, and all kinds of other treats. In order to satisfy his "passionate delight in spectacles" (215), she takes him to picture-shows, fairs, and cockfights – wherever his whim demands. To top it all, he comes to perfect a staple instance of Southern womanhood, the art of descending the staircase; each night he "came down the stairs with the air of one who has a grand opinion of himself" (214). Having feminized himself into a spectacle, an object of the gaze, he will perform the role of the Southern belle, who graciously grants his (her?) presence to the townspeople.

Yet the heterosexualization of their relationship does not come about through simple gender reversal. Indeed, Amelia will be the lover and Cousin Lyman will be the beloved; one the subject doing the pursuing, the other the object being pursued. Lyman's feminization and Amelia's masculinization seem to go counter to their respective empowerment and disempowerment: it is Lyman, the beloved, who controls this relationship. Of course, given the fact that gender reversal is necessary in both cases for this "heterosexual" game, heterosexuality is portrayed as an attachment of two "inverts." This operation, as Clare Whatling has demonstrated, is not devoid of its homosexual associations ("Reading" 246–247); here, homosexuality is evoked by the suggestion of a butch-femme performance, itself a heterosexual conceptualization of gay relationships, on the part of Amelia and Lyman, respectively.

The truth is that gender is wholly irrelevant in the attachments evolving throughout McCullers' story. "Let it be added here," the narrator contends in the middle of a somewhat abstract discussion of love, "that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring – this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth" (216). Indeed, while Amelia is positioned as the male lover in her relationship with Lyman, in her other relationship, the one with Marvin Macy, she takes the woman's object position:

here, she is the one desired and pursued by the man, who sees her as "[t]hat solitary, gangling, queer-eyed girl" (217) from whom he wants nothing but love. Here it is Macy who showers her with presents, "the whole of his worldly goods" (221) finally, but there is no way of winning her love (although she accepts his property). Refusing the object position, Miss Amelia throws him out. Macy returns years later to the house, finding the hunchback cousin there too, with whom they really hit it off. Now Cousin Lyman becomes the wooing male lover, showering Macy with all kinds of favors. But Lyman's subjectivity comes primarily from his exercise of language: he talks himself into being, first into being noticed and loved, later into being the lover himself. Threatened by getting marginalized by both Lyman and Macy, Amelia will stand up to the exploitative Macy (who has now moved in with them) and decides to have a boxing fight with Macy – man to man – so that she could finally take him on equal terms and beat him at a manly game. A practiced fighter, boxing with her punching bag every morning in her yard, Amelia is sure to win the fight. Lyman, however, who feels now he must support Macy from the impassioned lover's position, intervenes by jumping on Amelia's back and clutching her neck. Having victory over the woman, the two men disappear forever, leaving behind an utterly lonely, desolate, half-crazy Amelia.

McCullers seems to wholly ignore the assumptions underlying our culture that there are two genders, two sexes, and two sexualities, and that these are all fixed and unchanging. All three main characters are depicted as if they were not living in a world where sexual and gender roles were dramatically polarized. Gender relativity allows new entities to come about against or in the absence of existing conventions: all three subjectivities are unfixed and mutable, they all challenge the ruling ideology, producing new figurations and involving transgressions and category extensions. Subjectivity is indeed a shifting-moving process, where gender positions vary in terms of what is being inscribed by discourse; they change roles and positions over and over, as if identities were wholly fluid, protean, and relative. They could go any way in the individual combinations.

The transgressions between dichotomies are further problematized in David Henry Hwang's drama *M. Butterfly*, where discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and colonialism intersect, while imitation and reversal are foregrounded as dominant thematics. In his afterword to the play, Hwang labels *M. Butterfly* "deconstructivist" play (95). Indeed, in this drama of sex, politics, camaraderie, and spying, several binaries are being subverted, among them, man/woman, East/West, reality/fiction, innocence/experience, gay/straight, truth/deception, and copy/original.

This thematic of imitation is exploited in a two-fold manner: on the one hand, the French diplomat, René Gallimard plays out a performance of cultural imitation as he reenacts (or thinks he reenacts) the plot of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* (becoming both Pinkerton and Cio-Cio-San, actually), while on the other, an agent of the Chinese intelligence service puts on a masquerade of Oriental womanhood as s/he gives the performance of Gallimard's ideal of the "Perfect Woman."

The plot unfolds as the reworking of the popular Western opera (in fact, in several scenes we have a crisscrossing between performances of the Puccini opera and Song's "real-life" performance). Here, however, the love plot between the American naval officer and the Japanese Cio-Cio-San, or Madame Butterfly, gets subverted into a Frenchman falling in love (and having a long relationship) with the beautiful Chinese diva, Song Liling, who turns out to be not only a spy but also a man. If *Madame Butterfly* was, as Mari Yoshihara puts it, "a white female performance of white male Orientalist fantasy" (976), then *M. Butterfly* is its contemporary reworking, its parodic and subversive Asian re-performance of passing and Orientalism. So the play can be seen as the reverse staging of the narrative of "an exotic and imperialistic view of the East," as Hwang himself puts it (95) – in other words, Orientalism.

Orientalism, defined by Edward Said as an interest in the East which turns into "an all-consuming passion" (132), is present indeed as the hypotext. Here the East is not only shown as a "career" (which it certainly is for Gallimard), but is itself Orientalized in the sense that here too "[t]he relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (133). This relationship of power gets further gendered, exemplifying, as Yoshihara puts it, the "gendered dynamics of East-West relations founded upon unequal power relations" (975). Gallimard takes great pleasure in this gendered power relation, getting dizzy from recognizing himself as another Pinkerton, who "caught a butterfly who would writhe on a needle" (32) and from experiencing for the first time in his life "absolute power" over a woman: "I felt for the first time that rush of power – the absolute power of a man" (32). "The West thinks of itself as masculine," Song explains in court; "big guns, big industry, big money – so the East is feminine – weak, delicate, poor [...] but good at art, and full of inscrutable wisdom – the feminine mystique" (83).

A merging of the passing plot and the Orientalist narrative, the drama foregrounds the performative-imitative nature of Orientalist/feminine submission as a construction of the West's fantasy. As Gallimard's friend Marc says about Song,

"she must surrender to you. It is her destiny" (25). Or, as Song himself explains at the end, "[t]he West believes the East, deep down, *wants* to be dominated – because a woman can't think for herself" (83). Moreover, the "original" opera's wide popularity presupposes the Western point of view, as Gallimard learns from Song's explanation and, the hard way, from his own experience. "It's a very beautiful story," Gallimard admits; "Well, yes, to a Westerner," Song adds to the Frenchman's great surprise (17). Gallimard also learns that there is no innocent enjoyment of Orientalist narratives: it is not possible to hear, as Helga would want to, Puccini just "as a piece of beautiful music" (19), for this form of "innocence" only gives the green light to hegemony and domination under the guise of a love-story considered supremely beautiful within the Orientalist frame. Having fallen from the position of the "innocent imperialist" to the position of the helpless but "experienced" colonial victim, now gendering himself female, Gallimard will have experienced both perspectives, transgressing in the final scene all gender and cultural boundaries. Thus, in this second marriage of the narrative of Orientalism and the passing plot, he becomes Madame Butterfly and, committing hara-kiri, adopts the Oriental version of *dénouement*.

There is, however, an additional element here: Orientalism functions as an Althusserian ideology which will interpellate Gallimard: in this process, the French diplomat becomes a socially constituted subject. Orientalism is presented as a performative construction in both the opera and the drama: in fact, both Butterflies are cultural constructions, catering to the Orientalist fantasies of the men. But as much as Gallimard is constituted by power and ideology, he remains blind to his own Orientalism in the sense that he fails to see how his desire is moved by a particular cultural myth. Of course, Gallimard's subjugation itself two-fold: not only is he produced (interpellated) by Orientalism, but it also is being used by what Althusser might consider another ideological state apparatus, Chinese intelligence. Moreover, performative Orientalism is at work in Gallimard's two self-constructions too: both when he constructs himself as the powerful Western man and when he steps into the garb and role of the suicidal Cio-Cio-San.

Song seems to be similarly constructed by ideology, simultaneously by "true womanhood" and Orientalism. S/he appeals to existing gender conventions, staging and acting out well-known scripts in this performance – applying a complex technology of gender, to use de Lauretis' term, in constituting his body as female –, *as if* s/he was interpellated by the norms of gender. His is indeed a double masquerade, with mask, costume, and convention interacting in constituting him not only as

a woman but also as an Oriental woman desired by the Western man. As the imperialist's vision of the Oriental Butterfly, Song responds to the man's desire, sexual as well as political, letting him take the illusory role of a latter-day Pygmalion. "I am a man who loved a woman created by a man," he admits at the end (90).

In Gallimard's construction of the perfect woman as the Oriental woman, he makes her sole desire to please the Western man. The hypotext, however, is turned parodic, when it is revealed that it is the intelligence service of communist China who manipulates the French diplomat through Song and especially through the Westerner's blind belief in Orientalism. In the hypertext, power resides in the Orient ultimately, and the Westerner gets beaten at his own game by becoming the victim of his own cultural myth of domination.

The drama seems to carry the critique of essentialism further than other narratives of gender passing. Here it is not a man who simply prepares the surface of his body or takes women's clothing simply in order to look like a woman. In Song's case, deceit affects the functioning of gender. His performed gender is being put to "use," so to say, in bed for years; gender is not just theatrics, but gets "tested" at the point where, according to the sex/gender distinction, it is not gender but sex (biology, "nature," "essence") which should be at work – biology, which gender masquerade is not supposed to have affected. In this aspect, the play seems to enact the Butlerian tenet concerning the always already gendered nature of sex: the site of sexuality will shift from biology to gender and discourse, as Song performs a total, all-inclusive sex/gender passing. However, her seduction is carried out as much by the body as by language. Much like Don Juan, whose "erotic success," Shoshana Felman claims, "is accomplished by linguistic means alone" (*Scandal* 14), Song too seduces by producing a language of pleasure and desire, and prolongs, to use Felman's words again, "within desiring speech, the pleasure-taking performance of the very production of that speech" (15).

Furthermore, in the project of deception, the political motivation reinforces the erotic economy here: while tapping Gallimard's desire to be another Pinkerton, s/he seemingly creates a high-class marketable good of him/herself as a woman, while all the time s/he is the consumer going after the goods Gallimard can sell. This ambivalence of subject-object relations (where in terms of his erotic pursuit, Gallimard is the desiring consumer, while in his political pursuit, the Chinese agent takes the dominative position) leads to the gender reversal of the final scene, where Gallimard dies as just another abandoned Madame Butterfly. Through the two gender performances – the agent's as the diva Song and Gallimard's a Madame

Butterfly – power comes to be redistributed. To apply another phrase of Butler's, they "make over the terms of domination, a making over which is itself a kind of agency" (*Bodies* 137). Of course, the passer himself is not a free agent but the actual secret agent of the Chinese government, fully obeying his superiors.

The copy/original dichotomy concerns the way in which the primacy of the "original" – whether of gender categories or earlier narratives – is being questioned. While passing is indeed a process informed by imitation, its end-product can by no means be taken as a copy. For passing, as pointed out earlier, does not imitate the "original" ("essence") but reenacts the processes whereby that earlier "original" was constructed too. What Song performs is not some female essence but the performance of womanhood itself. She performs heterosexual performativity, thereby supplies a supporting argument to Butler's claim that "all gender is like drag, or is drag"; that "'imitation' is at the heart of the *heterosexual* project and its gender binarisms, that drag is not a secondary imitation that presupposes a prior and original gender, but that hegemonic heterosexuality is itself a constant and repeated effort to imitate its own idealizations" (*Bodies* 125).

I think one way Hwang deconstructs the original/copy dichotomy is by having Chinese intelligence use a male rather than a female agent. For if Song's gender had been just a copy and if an "original" had been more "authentic" or useful, then they should have (and most probably would have) employed a woman, a "true woman," to seduce the Frenchman and act as his desired Butterfly. Sex is again made irrelevant in gender performance: the "original" genital markers really do not matter—all that counts is that the performance be credible. Of course, "true womanhood" as an "original" gender identity is parodied here: it is the man who knows best how a real woman thinks, feels, looks, or how his needs should be catered to. "[O]nly a man knows how a woman is supposed to act" (63). Indeed, with this knowledge, s/he will out-woman all women.

Similar to how drag is described by Butler as disputing "heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality" (*Bodies* 125), so too, when Song claims that only men know what a true woman is, he disputes the woman's claim on "feminine" naturalness and originality, while contributes to the parodistic reidealization of woman. The model of true femininity is, then, a man here, along lines similar to those taken by the Polish performance artist Ktarzyna Kozyra, who was assisted by the Berlin-based drag queen Gloria Viagra is best assuming the role of the truly feminine (see front flap, Wróblewska). By allowing a man to know best what a real woman is, Hwang highlights the contingency of gender and lays claim to what

Butler calls the "transferability of the attribute" (*Undoing* 213): indeed, femininity, even in its "truest" form, is incidental and transferable to any other player of the mime.

But how come, Gallimard is so easily deceived? And, indeed, deceived in bed? This is the question posed in the French court as well:

> JUDGE: Did Monsieur Gallimard know you were a man?
> SONG: Well, he never saw me completely naked.
> JUDGE: But surely, he must've [...] how can I put this?
> SONG: Put it however you like. I'm not shy. He must've felt around? (81)

One answer to this question is given by Song himself (dressed in a suit already): "[m]en always believe what they want to hear. So a girl can tell the most obnoxious lies and the guys will believe them every time" (82). But Gallimard's vision is further tainted by his blind belief in Orientalism: he too only sees what he wants to see; moreover, his stereotypes are constructed by the myth of Orientalism. So he sees the West's (sexual) mastery over the East; this is what ultimately blinds him. Gallimard wants to believe the performer who performs the stereotype so dear to his own heart. (Of course, in addition to these Western clichés of the Orient, the drama exploits other national stereotypes, too: the Frenchman as sexual, as a "ladies' man," the French woman as accepting her husband's extramarital affairs, or Scandinavian women as being uninhibited about sexual matters.) Gallimard will have to come to the recognition that neither is the West masculine, nor the East feminine; moreover, not only is it impossible to tell one Butterfly from another, copy from original, useful from fake information, but also man from woman, heterosexual from homosexual.

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In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the following points.

First, performative subjectivities present convincing counter-arguments to the essentialist position. Nowhere do the texts of gender performativity refer to any kind of female essence or principle, even where gender is constructed in a performance of passing. Gender is shown as a construct, social and linguistic, and is constituted by a body whose biological markers are quite irrelevant.

Second, given the constructions of passing in both texts (Chinese man to Chinese woman, Frenchman to Japanese woman; woman to male lover, man to female beloved),

gender's catachrestic character gets highlighted: it is shown to be a metaphor lacking its referent in "reality." The "original" biological sex of the gender performer is made totally inconsequential: the "authenticity" of the performance has nothing to do with whether the performer is "originally" a man or a woman. In fact, there are no "original" or "true" genders to be "copied" when performed. It is not something "out there," which is cited, evoked, or imitated when gender is being performed; rather, those processes are iterated whereby gender is constructed again and again in discourse.

Third, the two texts show fundamental differences in terms of agency and the degree to which they each reproduce existing scripts. The *performance* text of Hwang reproduces some well-known scripts of gender normativity. And because of this reproduction, gender gets fixed into a single and culturally intelligible configuration: we all understand the theatrics of "Oriental womanhood," even if the performer is a man. But the question of agency emerges with a special twist here. Who acts as an agent in this construction? Is it the Western man, whose sexual desire and desire for power construct the Oriental woman? Or is it the Oriental "woman" "herself," who will put on the performance so desired by the Westerner? Neither, of course. Although Song is an actual agent of the Chinese, true agency lies with those who control him. The staging of womanhood is really directed, so to speak, by them; behind all performance, agency is with the Chinese intelligence, who really act as theater directors in the sense that they both create and manipulate the Westerner's desire and at the same time move the primary performer Song so that she fully cater to his needs.

In the *performative* text (McCullers), neither the issue of agency nor of the adherence to existing scripts seems any less complicated. Agency gets to be reproduced each time, as gender follows different norms in each interaction, leaving different a measure of control and initiative to the performer. As genders are performed against existing conventions, the subject positions that go with agency change. Moreover, as no one single script is being reiterated, genders will become multiple, unpredictable and, most of all, unintelligible. Indeed, the gender of Miss Amelia as the wooing male lover, of Cousin Lyman as the Southern belle, or of Marvin Macy as the beloved of Cousin Lyman – these are constructions illegible from the perspective of sex/gender and male/female binaries. Such genders will be unfixed, changing, and relative because the norms themselves will be created for each instance (instead of being ideologically given). Neither character will appear as

having a once and single subjectivity; rather, subjectivity markers will be shown as relative, depending on particular interactions and relationships.

To apply Tolstoy's apt distinction between happy and unhappy families to gender performances and performatives, one could say that all "happy *performances*" of gender – those "felicitous" performances which replay the existing scripts, fixing gender constructions in the realm of the intelligible – are all *alike*. The "unhappy" versions of gender construction, on the other hand – where "new" genders are performed beyond the fixed binaries, and where performativity challenges the normative rules of gender in an "infelicitous" way – are each different: they differ in their infelicities.

TROPING THE UNTHOUGHT
Catachresis in Emily Dickinson's Poetry

> "In the gap between what one wants to say (or what one perceives there is to say) and what one can say (what is sayable), words provide for a collaboration and a desertion."
> (Lyn Hejinian)

Catachresis: its rhetoric and poetics

Catachresis is an outstanding trope within Emily Dickinson's regime of innovation, although little attention has been paid to it.[1] In particular, catachresis contributes formidably to meaning-making in what Margaret H. Freeman calls Dickinson's "conceptual universe" (645). As one of the poetic devices used by this poet in favor of "polytropy" (see Hagenbüchle, "Poetic Covenant" 28),[2] it stands out as the trope that gave Dickinson ample linguistic space, a "capaciousness" within language, to use her own term. She could thus play with her "loved Philology" and her "Lexicon," her "only companion," without having to leave the realm of language (Fr713, Fr1715, L261). As Wendy Martin points out, Dickinson believed that words are crucial to making "perceptions palpable" and that language "made emotion and thought possible" (117). Through catachresis, Dickinson can thus access the knowledge that has been accumulated into language. In addition, catachresis enables her to accommodate language's ambiguities and undecidabilities.

Catachresis fits into the linguistic, poetic, and rhetorical "patents" on poetic invention identified by Roland Hagenbüchle, Cristanne Miller, Lynn Keller, Brita

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[1] I have found only one mention of catachresis in Dickinson criticism in Miller's treatment of "There's a certain Slant of light" (Fr320). This is, however, different from the trope I describe as being central in Dickinson's poetry. Miller identifies "negative definition or reverse catachresis" in Dickinson's "difference": the poet "creates absence instead of providing a new name or concept of it" (*Grammar* 99).

[2] The following abbreviations are used to refer to the writings of Emily Dickinson: Fr = *The Poems of Emily Dickinson*. Ed. R. W. Franklin. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998. Citation by poem number. L =*The Letters of Emily Dickinson*. Eds. Thomas H. Johnson and Theodora Ward. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1958. Citation by letter number.

Lindberg-Seyersted, Sharon Cameron, Josef Raab, and Shira Wolosky in their various discussions of Dickinson's poetic language.[3] What these critics focus on—and also defines catachresis—is a process of creating connections between signifiers without anchoring signs in the realm of the signified, thus making room for startling innovations and the creation of concepts formerly "unthought." Indeed, among the defining characteristics identified by classical and modern rhetoricians as being central to catachresis, the following two features are relevant when discussing Dickinson's catachrestic work: (1) troping that comes about by shifts among signifiers and (2) a radical potential for innovation.

(1) *As a metaphor without a referent, catachresis is not brought about by analogical duplication and replacement. Rather, changes in meaning come about by extension, that is, by shiftings along what Roman Jakobson termed the horizontal structure of language.* Rhetoricians early on emphasized the reliance of catachresis on extension. Pierre Fontanier (1827), for example, defined catachresis as a figure in which one expression is assigned to both a "first idea" and a "new idea," to which no expression had been assigned earlier (213). In other words, extension becomes the operative process in catachresis, replacing substitution (based on similarity) and duplication (of the literal into the figurative). Richard Parker's *Aids to English Composition*, one of the textbooks that were in use at Amherst Academy and Mount Holyoke during the time Dickinson was studying there (see Ross 93), explains catachresis in similar terms: it is "the reverse of tautology," where the same word [is used] in different senses" (70). Catachresis, in other words, is solely operative in signifier-signifier relationships—not signifier-signified or sign-referent relationships.

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[3]   The following list offers an overview of terms of other critics that I have used in this essay: Cameron, "opening semantic spaces for alternative words" (194); Hagenbüchle, "deliberate indeterminacy" ("Precision" 50), "ambivalence" ("Poetic Covenant" 16), "poetic language of open possibilities," the collapse of "the real and the symbolic into one," "poetics of process" or "aesthetics of process" ("Sumptuous" 3; "Aesthetics of Process" 143), "method of metonymy" or the "shift from metaphor to metonymy" ("Precision" 51; "Aesthetics of Process" 135), "semantic shift" ("Poetic Covenant" 28), "preference for asymmetrical structures" ("Precision" 40).
Keller and Miller, "techniques of indirection" (534); "reliance on nondeclarative rhetorical patterns" (545); Lindberg-Seyersted, "slantness" and "privateness" (103, 109); Miller, "frustrated reference" (*Grammar* 5), language "free of determined meaning" (19), "experimentalism" ("Dickinson's Experiments" 241), negating or subverting "established meanings in order to create new ones" (*Grammar* 182), the undercutting of readerly expectation by reordering "meaning along associative [...] lines" (46), "parataxis" or the "disjunctive or coordinate linking of ideas (31), "vehicular language" ("Structured Rhythms" 393); Vivian R. Pollak and Marianne Noble, "'patent' on invention" (42); Raab, "method of approximation" (274); Wolosky, "figural mismatch or slippage" (130–32).

While metaphor is grounded in human experience—the perception of similarity, analogy, or other "correlations in experience," as Zoltán Kövecses puts it (79)—no such "perceived structural similarity" (81) moves catachresis. Catachresis does not point outside of language; it does not fold experience, as it were, into "metaphorical analogies" (288). Instead, relying on processes of extension and shifting, catachresis is a purely linguistic operation. These two features—not pointing outside of language and not relying on analogical duplication—gain particular significance in Dickinson's poetry. Both the idea of circumference and her radical performances of gender are constructed within discourse in order to duplicate, in language, a preexisting extra-linguistic reality.

(2) *Offering a radical potential for innovation, the horizontal shiftings and extensions of catachresis account for the outstanding creative power of the trope.* Catachresis was considered to be "the most free and powerful of the tropes" by Renaissance rhetoricians, a "source of invention" providing "expression of imagination" (qtd. in Herman et al. 47). It was posited by César Du Marsais (1757) and Thomas Gibbons (1767), among others, as the "form of all invention," which "reigns over all the other figures" (qtd. in Herman et al. 47). Modern rhetoricians have also considered catachresis as a vehicle for invention: a trope that can, as Paul de Man explains, "dismember the texture of reality and reassemble it in the most capricious of ways"; the speaker is thus allowed to invent "the most fantastic entities by dint of the positional power inherent in language" (21). As such, catachresis has proven to be most helpful when referring to intellectual or philosophical concepts formerly viewed as unrepresentable or incomprehensible. As Michel Foucault explains, this trope creates a linguistic displacement that alters or subverts the order of things, thus allowing authors "to *discover* an unexpected space and to *cover* it with things never said before" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 16).

In Dickinson's poetry, catachresis indeed allows her to describe complex ideas and develop as-yet-unthought meanings. It is, moreover, the vehicle of a staple Dickinsonian operation: the "semantic shift," which Hagenbüchle describes as "the poet's tendency to select elements that as clues point to other elements as further clues" ("Poetic Covenant" 28); catachresis naturally takes Dickinson on a "linguistic quest that focuses on semantic boundaries" (34). To quote Hejinian, "language is one of the principal forms [poetic] curiosity takes" (49); "[l]anguage discovers what one might know, which in turn is always less than what language might say" (48). Such a claim would probably have pleased Dickinson, who uses catachresis to hear what language has to say and can say.

Dickinson also seems to find in catachresis a response to her fears about the limitations of language. Holding two somewhat incongruous or incompatible opinions about language, Dickinson, as Miller points out, both feared that words could not adequately express our thoughts and that words are beyond the control of the speaker (*Grammar* 131). Dickinson often believes that words are inadequate and lack force. For example, when writing to Mrs. Bowles, Dickinson claims: "My words are far away when I attempt to thank you" (L196). Dickinson complains on other occasions too that her words of gratitude cannot match her feelings: "To 'thank' you – [s]hames my thought!" (L249); "To thank you, baffles me" (L268); "I would like to thank you for your great kindness but never try to lift the words which I cannot hold" (L330). Catachresis, however, allows Dickinson to scramble word semantics, as it were, in order to add new meanings and thereby make words more adequate. For, language, as Dickinson insists, does not have words for every experience. For example, she writes that "There's something quieter than sleep" that "will not tell it's name" (Fr62). Similarly, no name exists for that "certain Slant of light" which she famously claims to be a "Seal Despair" (Fr320); and Dickinson alludes to another death-like, night-like, and frost-like moment of despair when she writes that "everything that ticked – has stopped – / And space stares – all around –" in "It was not Death, for I stood up" (Fr355).

When an unfamiliar experience demands expression, Dickinson can revert to catachresis and create new meanings by extending an existing concept. This kind of innovation is especially imaginative because extension reaches across the gaps and inadequacies of language. According to Dickinson, words must therefore be chosen with care: "I hesitate which word to take, as I can take but few and each must be the chiefest" (L873). And catachresis, which allows Dickinson to reorder and recreate meaning, indeed gives her the freedom to explore what is "chiefest." Dickinson's ideal speaker maps the importance of human sociality onto linguistic connections: "How lonesome to be an Article! I mean – to have no soul" (L354). This empathic speaker does not view language as a transparent medium but rather as another living being; poets can thus gain the "consent of Language" by way of "loved Philology" ("A word made Flesh is seldom" [Fr1715]). According to Miller's interpretation of this poem, human language consents to the "manipulation" of the loving philologist and will "in turn replenish its meaning" (*Grammar* 172). When encountering experiences for which no adequate word exists—for example, the "Bandaged moments" of the soul, "moments of escape" that "are not brayed of Tongue" ("The Soul has Bandaged moments" [Fr360]), and the "formal feeling"

that comes after great pain ("After great pain, a formal feeling comes –" [Fr372])—Dickinson nevertheless finds a description for it: she fills gaps in language, and "*cover*[s]" them, as Foucault puts it, "with things never said before" (*Death and the Labyrinth* 16).

The word circumference functions as a recurrent catachresis in Dickinson's poetry. In her usage of this term, she extends the dictionary meanings associated with circumference as found in the 1844 edition of *Webster's*: "the line that bounds a circle, the exterior line of a circular body, the whole exterior surface of a round body, a periphery"; "the space included in a circle"; "an orb, a circle, any thing circular or orbicular." Dickinson, however, extends the meaning of circumference to include a particular state of consciousness, a formerly unthought or unconceptualized idea. In his landmark chapter on circumference in Dickinson's poetry, Albert J. Gelpi defines it as both referring to an "extension and limit": "the farthest boundary of human experience" as well as "the 'terminus' of human delimitation" (122). According to Robert Gillespie, circumference refers to "a limitless expansion away, a radiation in all directions" (255). Citing "At Half past Three, a single Bird" (Fr1099), Gillespie describes circumference as an "absorbing event" demanding "expansion," when consciousness "swells out to encompass time and space" (256).

In several poems, circumference indeed refers to a state of being taken to the edge of space and time. In "When Bells stop ringing – Church – begins –" (Fr601), Dickinson presents it as a moment in which time is suspended and space is frozen: "When Cogs – stop – that's Circumference – ." In "I saw no Way – The Heavens were stitched –" (Fr633), circumference allows the speaker to step out of both time (to go "Beyond the Dip of Bell") and space (to touch the universe from an Earth with "reversed" "Hemispheres"). Circumference belongs to what Gillespie terms Dickinson's "vocabulary of awe" (250) and the catachresis of "Bride of Awe" marries, so to speak, the experience of circumference with that of awe ("Circumference thou Bride of Awe" [Fr1636]). Or, as Raab puts it, "the awe of the ungraspable is caused by and also calls for the poetic method of circumferential approximation" (274). Although the catachresis of "Bride of Awe" seems to re-affirm conventional patterns of heterosexuality, semantic shifting nevertheless introduces elements of subversion because the power relations of the bridal pair ("Circumference" and "Awe") remain unspecified and in flux: "Circumference" appears as both subject and object, "possessing" as well as being "possessed."

The exploration of boundaries features prominently in Dickinson's understanding of the concept of circumference: the self leaves its own peripheries in order

to dissolve into the limitlessness of space and time, ultimately allowing circumference to become the "business" of the poet (L268). Other poems dealing with the boundaries of space and time further elaborate on this new idea of circumference: "This was a Poet –" (Fr446) describes an experience "Exterior – to Time," while "I had no time to Hate –" (Fr763) depicts the bizarre sensation of losing gravitation, of passing things, and addresses the fear of never coming back. Although obviously not familiar with the physical experience of stepping out of time and place, Dickinson nevertheless gains access to such concepts figuratively, via troping.

Moreover, the catachresis of circumference in Dickinson's poetry seems to act as a meta-term for the catachrestic process itself. As used by Dickinson, circumference, like catachresis, becomes a free-standing sign with no referential meaning and with nothing (literally) *out there* to be pointed at or duplicated by language; as such circumference "does not go outside the language," as Jacques Derrida puts it ("White Mythology" 59), but retains those "uncertainties of reference" that Miller names as being among the most prominent figures of Dickinson's language (*Grammar* 1). Both circumference and catachresis focus on boundaries—circumference on the boundaries of consciousness and catachresis on the boundaries of semantics—and point to Dickinson's curiosity about what language can mean. Finally, definitions of Dickinson's use of circumference as an "outreaching" (Raab 285) and a "limitless expansion away" (Gillespie 255) correspond to the meaning-making process of catachresis, in which one expression expands to envelop another. Dickinson herself uses the word "Disseminating" to describe the epistemic outreaching of "Circumference" in "The Poets light but Lamps –":

> In here as do the Suns –
> Each Age a Lens
> Disseminating their
> Circumference –
> (Fr930)

Circumference shares with catachresis the ability to shift and extend. Just like the lens that multiplies or disseminates the rays of the sun, catachresis pushes poetic knowledge to its limits of circumference and thereby multiplies and disseminates meanings. In short, the concept of circumference used as a catachresis becomes a figuration of the workings of the trope itself, a catachresis of catachresis.

Although she never used the term catachresis, Dickinson, a "rhetorical poet," as Fred D. White calls her (13), must have been acquainted with the trope. She could easily have had the catachrestic mode in mind in "The Poets light but Lamps –" (Fr930) in which "Suns"—referring to poets—are "Disseminating their Circumference." In other poems too Dickinson articulates ideas of the poet as an active shaper of language, one who "Distills amazing sense / From Ordinary Meanings" ("This was a Poet –" [Fr446]). As Jane Donahue Eberwein points out, the process of "distillation" represents "the essence of poetry" for Dickinson (138). But poetry can also derive from the violent compression of rose petals ("Essential Oils – are wrung –" [Fr772]). In the latter poem, Dickinson uses the image of "Screws" metaphorically to refer to the poetic technique of "wringing," as it were, new meanings from words. In the former, distillation is applied to the attar itself, thus creating an even more concentrated and as such more valuable liquid (see Miller, *Grammar*, esp. 27, 118–21). Both poems are about the poetic process; both use the metaphor of perfume, which expands and diffuses in an unbounded, limitless manner. And both poems can be read as theorizing catachresis due to their emphasis on how poetic language is created. Meanings reside in words in an immanent manner and are brought to light (made visible, excavated) by evaporating non-essential elements during distillation or by the compression of words against one another. Or to use Dickinson's words: "To the faithful Absence is condensed presence" (L587).

Dickinson's other accounts of the poetic process can also be interpreted as referring to catachresis, or some characteristics of it. Whenever she sets poetry against prose, and distinguishes between techniques of liberating and anchoring language in reality (shutting in the poet, as if in a closet, and putting shackles on her mind), her gestures can be interpreted as referring to this trope. For example, in "I dwell in Possibility –" (Fr466), possibility, being "A fairer House than Prose," allows Dickinson to collect more meanings: "The spreading wide my narrow Hands / To gather Paradise." And by this gesture of "spreading wide," the poet can catch opposites too; like in the catachreses constructed for captivity and life-death: "Captivity is Consciousness – / So's Liberty –" in "No Rack can torture me –" (Fr649) and "Life is death we're lengthy at, death the hinge to life" (L281). Moreover, in "There's a certain Slant of light" (Fr320), the famous "Meanings," located in "internal difference," seem to translate rhetorically into products of catachrestic construction. The poem describes events that take place within the closed space of the cathedral. Neither the beam of light nor the heft of tunes leaves this space. The "internal difference" thus comes about solely by a change in the inner dynamics of lights and tunes or

word combinations. The "Slant of light," which Dickinson credits with throwing light on meanings, thus turns into a possible metaphor for catachresis, which is built out of differences in meaning *within* a system of signifiers. Following this logic, the other famous poem about a "slanting" method of poetry, "Tell all the truth but tell it slant –" (Fr1263), can also be read as a description of the catachrestic process.

Gender as catachresis: a master concept contested

In the rest of this essay, I will explore how catachresis becomes a vehicle for Dickinson for contesting some master concepts that her culture took for granted. Prominent among these is the concept of gender, or womanhood, as a performance. In her catachrestical performances of gender Dickinson developed a matching catachrestical poetics that spilled over into poems on various other subjects: God, death, and psychological states.

Performances of womanhood, traditional as well as untraditional ones, form a conspicuous group of Dickinson's poems. As Vivian R. Pollak puts it, gender was a "generative obsession" (18) of Dickinson, who was so radically aware of herself as a female subject. And critics have indeed long noticed and interpreted Dickinson's so-called "poses." Lindberg-Seyersted refers to Mabel Loomis Todd's journal entries on the poet's poses, and quotes Austin's remark that his sister "definitely posed" in her letters (27). Adrienne Rich discusses the various "careers" open to Dickinson (58) and the feminine "roles" her poetic personae tried on. Suzanne Juhasz writes about Dickinson's "rejection of women's traditional roles" (*Naked and Fiery* 21) in order to get out of her "double-bind situation": the conflict between her two selves as a woman and a poet (2–3). Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar cite critics calling Dickinson "one of American literature's most expert poseurs" (583). Dickinson's poses allow her to metamorphose from "a real person (to whom aggressive speech is forbidden) into a series of characters or supposed persons[4] (for whom assertive speeches must be supplied)" (584). Gilbert and Gubar examine these various "'supposed persons' whom Dickinson 'becomes' as her inner novel unfolds": from the irresponsible child, "little Pilgrim," "defiant child-woman," and Daisy to Loaded "Gun/speaker" and other figurations of masculinity that become associated with

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[4] With "supposed persons" Gilbert and Gubar refer to Dickinson's famous admission phrased in a letter to Higginson (July 1862): "When I state myself, as the Representative of Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person" (L268).

womanhood. Paula Bennett, however, restricts Dickinson's poses to her life, insisting that her poetic personae form a coherent sensibility that is associated with her maturity as a poet: "Dickinson seems to have confined most of her highly manipulative posing to life; in her art, there was a gradual growth towards greater and greater coherence and integration as she learned to accept choices she had made earlier" (273).

Juhasz and Miller discuss Dickinson's performances of gender within the context of Judith Butler's theory, understanding gender identity categories as performative productions affected by social practices and discourses. They demonstrate that Dickinson's "variant performances of gender are crucial to the general construction of her poetry" (107). Among these variant performances, Juhasz and Miller identify, on the one hand, "proper configurations of the feminine," those that include a "lack of agency, initiative, and power," in poems that are "replete with conventional performative signs" (113) and, on the other, "performances of alterity without the markers of the normative." Among such normative markers and "conventional gender signs" Juhasz and Miller list a girl looking into the mirror, one tying her bonnet, childhood dolls and a string of spools, a female speaker "going out with [a] basket to pick berries" (113), and "the 'little duties' of gender conventions" (116). Cultural signs that destabilize conventional notions of femininity include various presentations of power and activeness on the part of women, an "unattached and unsubordinated state (which may seem to be manly)" (114). Such "performances of gendered identity," Juhasz and Miller continue, "utilize the gaps between acts of gender to enable the possibility for the breaking or subversive repetition of gender styles" (125).

In Dickinson's poetry, these kinds of performances invite two different figures: metaphor and catachresis. While Dickinson reserves metaphor for performances of familiar gender roles, she regularly employs catachresis for the performance of new gender constructs of alterity. As Adelaide Morris has argued, the figure of metaphor is part of a conventional rhetoric well suited to an existing "conceptual realm" (103) informed by the dominance/submission structures of patriarchy (102). This is why the Master letters, for example, abound in images of "stasis" (107), or metaphors of dominance and submission. The letters construct the persona of Daisy, whose only desire is to please the Master: "only asks – a task […] to make that master glad." Aware of her weakness, she accepts the punishment while hoping for forgiveness: "but punish don't banish her – shut her in prison, Sir – only pledge that you will forgive – sometime – before the grave, and Daisy will not mind" (L248). But,

according to Morris, Dickinson is also searching for a different rhetoric; one that "expand[s] metaphorical contexts" in order to describe a love that is "outside conventional romantic patterns" (106)—that which, as Dickinson herself puts it, is "Without a Formula" ("'Tis Seasons since the Dimpled War" [Fr1551]). As examples, Morris cites non-static, or catachrestic images in Dickinson's solar poems such as "Blazing in Gold and quenching in Purple" (Fr321), "The Sun kept stooping – stooping – low!" (Fr182), and "I send Two Sunsets –" (Fr557), where the sun does not "stand for dominion but for daily sharing, the joining of the two houses in a moment of radiance" (108). Reflecting on Morris, Margaret Homans argues that the "rhetoric founded on metaphor's hierarchical relation of difference" is modeled by heterosexuality. Homans points out, however, that alternative, non-hierarchical structures of a "rhetoric of sameness" (132) come about "horizontally on the basis of similarity and equality" (120), and may be considered a "form of metonymy" (124). According to Homans, "[t]his model of language" involves the "greatest possible contiguity" (126): "As the notion of 'standing for,' or metaphor, becomes metonymy [...] a dualistic heaven is revised into a perpetual breaking of boundar[ies]," and "gender difference passes into sameness" (130).

I would, however, argue that the figure that "expand[s] metaphorical contexts" (Morris) and the "form of metonymy" involving the "greatest possible contiguity" and allowing for the perpetual breaking of boundaries (Homans) is in fact catachresis. For, this trope posits a radical subversion of the production of meaning, thus allowing for the poetic figuring of formerly unscripted performances. Not only does catachresis move horizontally among signifiers (like metonymy), but this movement also affects the individual assignment of the signs. Catachresis does not only connect signifiers (again, like metonymy), but it opens up their signifying structures and affects the internal semantics of individual signifiers (changing what individual words mean); it thus creates new formulae for the formerly unscripted and unthought. This is what I see as the origin of Dickinson's "revisionary language," which is made up of "internally generated meanings." Dickinson thus "discovers within the very indeterminacy of language a radically modern linguistic home" (Diehl 174).

Traditional gender formations come about when existing scripts of womanhood are evoked and replayed, making these constructions culturally intelligible. And, according to Butler, gender is most visibly "achieved and stabilized through heterosexual positioning" (*Psychic Life* 135). In Dickinson's poetry, normative gender performances are presented through metaphor, the figure which, as Hagenbüchle

claims, "presuppose[s] a stable world" ("Precision" 40). These women all belong to God's heaven and conform obediently to conventions; they perform God's script—which, for Dickinson, is both "prosy" and metaphorical. And there are numerous poems of gender compliance in which Dickinson tries on several traditional gender roles: the lady courted, the innocent girl of "the White Election," a woman portrayed in a painting, the abandoned woman, the wife, and the bride. These roles are skillfully constructed to function in conformity with conventions (the love-and-marriage plot), and normative social scripts of 19th century womanhood. As Barbara Welter notes, the "Cult of True Womanhood" included four behavioral attributes: piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity, and these seemed to regulate expected gender performances. As Juhasz and Miller point out, in "I tie my Hat – I crease my Shawl –" (Fr522), gender is the act that "keeps us in culture": "it makes us a 'Man' or 'Woman,'" providing "protection" and "coverage" (116). Dickinson beautifully illustrates this claim through the poem's presentation of "Life's little duties": gendered "errands" of the housewife, like tying her hat, creasing her shawls, or putting flowers on the table, bring about a social equilibrium that "hold our Senses – on – ."

According to Derrida, metaphor is the trope of mimesis ("Flowers" 247). Thus, as a trope that relies on the dual structure of signifier and signified, it seems to be the obvious figure for representing traditional gender constructions, where familiar scripts are performed. For example, in an early letter to Austin, Dickinson presents herself as being able to carry out performances of traditional feminine trivialities.

> As *simple* as you please, the *simplest* sort of simple – I'll be a little ninny – a little pussy catty, a little Red Riding Hood, I'll wear a Bee in my Bonnet, and a Rose bud in my hair, and what remains to do you shall be told thereafter. (L45)

The seemingly feminine frailty of these personae is, however, ironically complemented by strength and cunning: the "pussy catty" might use her claws, Little Red Riding Hood outwits the big bad wolf, bees can sting, and roses have thorns. Dickinson is at her most playful here: she reassures Austin of her ability to play the social game of heterosexuality, yet she evokes the possibility of speaking back and acting differently from even "the simplest sort of simple" positions. In "A Bee his Burnished Carriage" (Fr1351), the courting lover is presented as a bee, and the courted woman as the rose. The metaphor rests on the solid duality of one element evoking the other (bee/man, rose/woman), allowing for the figure to come about

through substitution and remapping. But while the metaphors of the bee and the rose translate unproblematically into man and woman, the "Moment consummated" is unproblematic for one participant only: the bee/man. The rose/woman receives the visit with tranquility and submission, yet cannot share the ecstasy of the bee/man. Agency only pays off for the bee/man: the rapture is his; all that remains for the rose/woman of patience, however, is "Humility."

The persona in the "Master letters" (L187, L233, L248) is also conveyed by metaphors. The normative script used here is that of the vulnerable and fragile woman, weak and ailing, like all Victorian women were expected to be. The Master letters can be read as performances of these scripts: the humble Daisy, interested in flowers and birds only, is wholly dependent upon her Lord, and is excessively characterized by what Rachel Blau DuPlessis calls "romantic thralldom" (66). Dickinson, however, also plays with these roles and poses in an ironic manner: she offers to play humble Daisy as a generic convention—of initiating, asserting, proposing—resulting in a position that is all but humble. Self-consciously asserting the power to choose one's own love interest in writing would certainly not have belonged to Victorian social conventions of femininity. This self-proclaimed submissiveness permeates the poems written around the time of the Master letters. In "I am ashamed –I hide –" (Fr705), the "Dowerless Girl"—bashful, self-effacing, and ashamed of her own worthlessness—gives a theatrical performance of well-known scripts of Victorian womanhood. "A Wife – at Daybreak – I shall be –" (Fr185) can also be read as an instance of expressive-citational theatricality; this time it is the bride on the eve of her wedding day who is speaking, and is still unable to comprehend the wonder of turning overnight from "Maid" into "Bride." In "I would not paint – a picture –" (Fr348), Dickinson's speaker performs what Rich calls an "orthodox 'feminine' role": the subject is "receptive" rather than "creative"; "viewer rather than painter; listener rather than musician; acted-upon rather than active" (108). Since, as Juhasz and Miller point out, "gender is importantly imbricated in this relationship" (123), the alternative role is that of the masculinized artist who is everything the woman is not: a creative painter or musician, a speaker, and a thinker of dangerous thoughts:

> I would not paint – a picture –
> I'd rather be the One
> [...]

I would not talk, like Cornets –
I'd rather be the One

[...]

Nor would I be a Poet –
It's finer – Own the Ear –
(Fr348)

The metaphors used in this poem stand solidly on their dual structures: woman/portrait, man/painter; woman/cornet (played upon), man/musician (playing the cornet); woman/owning the ear (hearing the poet), man/mouth (the poet speaking). Given the fact that the renouncing speaker—whom her culture places as both the direct and indirect object of the soliloquy (she is the one being painted, sung, and versed; as well as spoken to)—is the active speaker of the poem, and because the acceptance of traditional roles is presented as a conscious choice, the poem nevertheless takes on a shrewdly ironic tone. The metaphors of the text (woman as portrait, woman as cornet, man as musician, man as poet) contradict those in the subtext (woman speaking as an artist: a painter, musician, versifier), leading to the conclusion that Dickinson plants a subversive subtext even in poems that on the surface confirm traditional gender roles.

This same self-deprecating tone is used by the female speaker who claims: "I was the slightest in the House –" (Fr473), who takes the "smallest Room," never speaks "unless addressed," and expects to die "noteless." In "Heart! We will forget him!" (Fr64) the speaker addresses her own heart. Produced as much by the cult of purity as by the cult of female sacrifice, she is unable to decide whether she will be able to forget the man who has abandoned her. The neatly constructed metaphor of "'wife'"/"Czar"/" 'Woman'" in "I'm 'wife' – I've finished that –" (Fr225) also contributes to the performance of traditional womanhood, linking safety and comfort to marriage; however, a subversion of womanhood is also implied due to the male-associated sovereignty of the female "Czar" and again lends ironic reverberations to gender constructs. Similarly, in "Mine – by the Right of the White Election!" (Fr411), the metaphors of "White Election," the "Royal Seal," "Delirious Charter," and womanhood as a "Titled" state contribute to a self-mocking performance of a celebrated normative script, according to which, women are perceived as coming into their "own" after marriage.

Different performances of female subjectivity, however, can be detected in cases that reveal what Juhasz and Miller call "conceptual gaps between variant constructions of gender" (113). In these spaces, "between conventional constructions of gender [Dickinson] presents modifications, diversions, and conditions that are contentious or problematic, and in this fashion, she skews and alters gender identities" (Juhasz and Miller 113). In these gaps or spaces womanhood comes about through acts of non-compliance with existing norms of heterosexuality. Unlike citational performances of traditional gender roles, these are processes with an ontological force: they bring about new discursive constructions of womanhood against a background of contrary expectations. Resisting and subverting gender normativity, such gender constructions are open, multiple, unstable, unpredictable, problematic, and often unintelligible.

As Juhasz and Miller note, Dickinson's poetry is rich in unexpected gender representations that point to "the possibility for the breaking or subversive repetition of gender styles" (125). These performances of alterity seem to signal, as Bennett puts it, how Dickinson is "violating the basic prescriptions of her time and the entire thrust of the education she received both at home and at school" (16). They thus refer to "her inability to conform" (25); or, what Susan Howe calls Dickinson's "insubordination" (144). This, in other words, is agency in the form of Foucauldian *assujettissement* (*Power/Knowledge* 97), a form of self-construction that resists power dynamics that were intended to subject women. In Dickinson's poetry agency is appropriated against the intentions of power, agency being, to use Butler's definition, "the assumption of a purpose *unintended* by power" (*Psychic Life* 15).

Unlike citational performances of gender, constructed by way of dual metaphoric structures, subversive gender performances are regularly presented by catachresis; this trope is thus brought into the service of anti-patriarchal poetry. Dickinsonian topoi for gender roles for which no name exists, to invoke Gibbons's definition of catachresis, place women outside conventional love-and-marriage plots and include "bachelorhood," or creative celibacy, the female lover as a buyer, wifehood "without the Sign," and the creative woman. These are all gender conceptualizations "Without a Formula": new discursive entities that are brought about, via catachresis, against or in the absence of existing discourses or conventions. While Dickinson's dominant topoi for the figure of the poet include fixed traditional metaphors such as a gardener tending to flowers or a songbird, whose "business [it] is to *sing*" (L269), no neat metaphorical conceptualizations can be detected in Dickinson's more subversive gender poetry. The figurations of these new subjectivities are multiple,

unfixed, mobile, and mutable, involving transgressions and extensions of categories. The subject comes about by resisting normative codes of thought and behavior and by enacting ruptures from convention. These processes also rely on repetition, quotation, or citation; only this is a quotation with a difference: one discarding previously coded scripts, ignoring pre-established formulae, and replacing earlier contexts with new ones.

Dickinson's practice of using catachresis for performances of gender alterity furthermore seems to prefigure the poststructuralist thesis that envisions womanhood as a catachresis. Butler, who first expounded on this idea in *Gender Trouble*,[5] suggests that the theory of gender performativity necessarily implies what gender is not (an essence, objective ideal, or fact) and what it is (acts creating an idea):

> Because there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. (140)

Gender is thus a figure without a referent, one constituted solely by acts; in other words, the concept is created via the process of catachresis.

Dickinson somehow knew this, or at least knew that those female figures that do not conform to then current ideals of womanhood have less palpable connections with reality than women who did perform traditional roles. Indeed, while the figure of the bride does have its referent in reality, "The Wife without the Sign" in "Title divine, is mine" (Fr194), does not. This difference, however, does not run counter to understanding gender in both cases as an expression of catachresis. Presentations of traditional womanhood, of the bride, for example, invite the figure of metaphor into Dickinson's poetry. This is not because there is any existing female essence, ideal, or fact that can be expressed, but rather because these performances are so familiar and palpable, thus creating the impression that there is indeed an essence or fact behind them. Still, here too, gender is a matter of pure performance. In the case of the "Wife without the Sign," however, womanhood does not even carry a semblance of the real: this reincarnation of womanhood does not exist except as a catachresis, a figure without a referent., Both the bride and the "Wife

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[5]   Butler does not use the term catachresis in *Gender Trouble*, but in *Bodies That Matter* and later writings she does explicitly discuss gender in this way.

without the Sign" are examples of role playing[6] that merely differ in the nature of their scripts: in the first case, these scripts preexist the performance, but in the second case, they are created by the poet for each performance.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak gives a historical explanation of how, since Friedrich Nietzsche, theorists have insisted that woman, as a master concept, is a catachresis. Gender difference is constructed, as Spivak claims, "inside male-dominated historical narratives of propriation" (127), where the defining narrative preexists individual gender development; or, as Butler puts it, sex is always already gendered (*Gender Trouble* 7). Not only is woman not an ontologically given entity, she is also not a regular metaphor. Womanhood does, however, become a catachresis, when in an "emancipated moment of emergence," it becomes both "a metaphor without a literal referent standing in for a concept" and a "necessary and irreducible misnomer for this prior or primal figurative."

Dickinson seems to be following this trajectory of making womanhood into a catachresis: she overwrites "male-dominated" "narratives of propriation" (Spivak 127) and adds new meanings to her concept of gender. Dickinson's revised womanhood does not satisfy the Nietzschean "condition of possibility of 'truth'" (qtd. in Spivak 127): the signifier does not stand for any existing signified presence "out there." Dickinson does not record "truths" that preexist the recording; instead, she constructs new concepts in language and poetry that she can only witness or experience as they are being constructed. Dickinson's new conceptionalization of womanhood is a figure without a literal referent: it is brought about solely by linguistic operations and can only find expression within reimagined patterns of language. Dickinson often crosses familiar boundaries segregating gender categories and expands her idea of womanhood by appropriating meanings that are traditionally associated with manhood. Such an extension of meaning can be detected in Dickinson's use of "bachelorhood" as fitting the female gender too. Writing that she was "born for Bachelorhood" (qtd. in Martin 151), Dickinson opted for a life that might give her the freedom of bachelors who enjoy the possibility of choosing and rejecting new potential partners. Dickinson asserts herself as a subject and agent here, who, with the same gesture, refuses "spinsterhood," which frames women as repeatedly refused objects. This social self-construction as a bachelor is, moreover, complemented by a spiritual self-construction, conveyed by the term celibacy, another catachresis. Celibacy's original meaning was restricted to male

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[6] Donahue Eberwein points to this metaphorical use in connection to what she calls "bridal poems" (176).

members of Catholic orders, whose devotion to Christ did not position them according to heterosexual lines of agency and submission, as was the case for nuns. Nuns would not be called celibate; for, as "brides" of Christ, they performed a heterosexual script of marriage within the bounds of the convent. Dickinson thus extends celibacy to include a woman devoting her life to a deity who is as powerful to her as Christ is to priests and monks: poetry.

Dickinson often thought of marriage as an unequal sacrifice, allowing no opportunity for her creativity to flourish. Indeed, seeing married women behave like flowers "with their heads bowed in anguish before the mighty sun" (L93), Dickinson dreaded the moment when she too would be "yielded up." As she wrote to Susan,

> How dull our lives must seem to the bride, and the plighted maiden, whose days are filled with gold, and who gather pearls every evening, but to the *wife*, Susie, sometimes the *wife forgotten*, our lives seem dearer than all others in the world [...]. Oh, Susie, it is dangerous, and it is all too dear, these simple trusting spirits, and the spirits mightier, which we cannot resist! [...] I tremble lest at sometime I, too, am yielded up. (L93)

Elsewhere Dickinson similarly disrupts conventional, idealized terms for love. In "I came to buy a smile – today –" (Fr258), she pictures love in terms of a trade relation, with the woman bargaining for her lover's smile. Dickinson thereby extends the concept of love to encompass the idea, or rather metaphor, of love as a form of commerce initiated by women as active subjects and not as "objects" to be "owned."

> I came to buy a smile – today –
> But just a single smile –
> The smallest one opon your face –
> Will suit me just as well –
> (Fr258)

Indeed, the figure of the woman as a buyer dictating the terms of a contractual relationship could not be more different from the modest, self-deprecating girl in Dickinson's traditional metaphors, who is offering herself to be mastered by her lord. Although she too is conventionally feminine in her humble addresses, she claims to be in a position to "Bargain" for a smile. In "I'm ceded – I've stopped being

Their's –" (Fr353),[7] Dickinson's new woman emerges as a mature, willful, self-con-
fident, independent, and majestic individual:

> I'm ceded – I've stopped being Their's –
> The name They dropped opon my face
> With water, in the country church
> Is finished using, now,
> And They can put it with my Dolls,
> My childhood, and the string of spools,
> I've finished threading – too –
>
> Baptized, before, without the choice,
> But this time, consciously, Of Grace –
> Unto supremest name –
> Called to my Full – The Crescent dropped –
> Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
> With one – small Diadem –
>
> My second Rank – too small the first –
> Crowned – Crowing – on my Father's breast –
> A half unconscious Queen –
> But this time – Adequate – Erect,
> With Will to choose,
> Or to reject,
> And I choose, just a Cro
> (Fr353)

As the passivity associated with the verb forms ("I'm ceded," "Is finished," "Bap-
tized," "Called") disappears and is transformed into new, more active forms ("I've
stopped," "I've finished," "to choose," "to reject," "I choose"), the female speaker
becomes a subject as she literally becomes the subject of her active-verb sentences
and her acts. The idea of self-possession is now included into a new understanding
of womanhood. Having discarded known scripts of Victorian womanhood, the
speaker is in full command of herself. This is illustrated by a reference to a new

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[7]   Rich calls this a "poem of great pride—not pridefulness, but *self*-confirmation" (111).

type of "circumference," one that "fill[s] up" "Existence's whole Arc": the speaker reigns over herself in full recognition of her creative powers: "Adequate – Erect, / With Will to choose, / Or to reject"). As catachresis thus turns into a trope of mastery, poetics links up with experience.

Applying a similar catachresis of sovereign female creativity, Dickinson celebrates Elizabeth Barrett Browning as a woman poet, whose "Head [was] too High- to Crown –" in "Her – last Poems –" (Fr600). Browning's agency is thus discursively produced through a reference to the lack of conventional language. Dickinson refuses to use discourses of power that "originally" constitute Browning as an object who can be "crowned" or "identified" by an existing script. In this case, the poetic subject does not come about in the Althusserian manner of being interpellated by ideology, but instead by enacting a rupture from convention: by the process of *assujettissement*. Indeed, as Butler points out, there is a difference between being acted upon by ideology and being enacted into a state: "[p]ower not only *acts on* a subject but, in a transitive sense, *enacts* the subject into being" (*Psychic Life* 13).

In "Title divine, is mine" (Fr194), the speaker gains her "Crown" by acting as a creative master. As Martin claims, "she is the territory that others must relinquish; self-centered, she now claims the right to devote her energy to her own work" (103). Indeed, it is the speaker's creativity—and not her status as a bride, being literally "held" or "Bridalled"[8]—that bestows "Title divine" upon her, allowing her to become a "Wife without the Sign," clearly a contradiction in terms:

> Title divine, is mine.
> The Wife without the Sign –
> Acute Degree conferred on me –
> Empress of Calvary –
> Royal, all but the Crown –

[8] On Dickinson's pun on "bridalled" and "bridled," see Martin (104). I would only like to add that Dickinson here echoes "bridling metaphors" that were used to refer to married women and permeated English texts and images from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries. For example, the author of "An Homily of the State of Matrimony" (1563) states that "good conscience might be preserved on both parties in bridling the corrupt inclinations of the flesh within the limits of honesty" (Payne-Hunter 175). The "scold's bridle" appears as a sign of governance in marriage in the "Wife of Bath's Prologue" in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (813), while the horse's bridle refers to the act of keeping a woman down in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* (Act IV, Scene I). As Lynda E. Boose explains, the bridle was "implicated in the long history of women's socialization into shame and its culturally transmitted, narrowed allowances of female selfhood" (189). Such instruments have indeed survived from as late as the nineteenth century (Boose 197).

Betrothed, without the Swoon
God gives us Women –
When You hold Garnet to Garnet –
Gold – to Gold –
Born –Bridalled – Shrouded –
In a Day –
Tri Victory –
"My Husband" –Women say
Stroking the Melody –
Is this the way –
(Fr194)

Read closely, this piece is a catachrestic bonanza, with at least five catachrestic figures in the first half of the poem. The dominant catachresis occurs in the second line: "Wife without the Sign," which turns lack into presence. This woman, as Bennett puts it, achieves "a new ontological status: woman-without-being-wife" (78); it allows for a new kind of power, gained from creativity, and keeps this woman in a perpetual state of transformation. "Acute Degree" furthermore functions as a catachresis inserting "slantness" into the semantics of this new female "degree," or title: acute, according to *Webster's*, refers to "less than a right angle"; the speaker's new "Degree" thus literally does not fit into pre-established, rigid patterns. "Empress of Calvary" links female power to the passion of Christ; it thus suggests both a partnership in suffering and a partnership in power. "Royal, all but the Crown" is a catachresis that parallels "Wife without the Sign," except that the internal semantic contradiction is less prevalent: while it is not possible to be a wife and not be married, it is possible to be royal but not be on the throne. This inclusion of contradictory elements into a new (catachrestic) concept is further explored in "Betrothed, without the Swoon." This line implies that a woman's fainting and nervous excitement, aspects that are denied by the poem's speaker, are conventional and necessary gender signs accompanying a man's proposal and the prospect of marriage. The coeval processes of becoming a poet and catachresis thus allow Dickinson to transform the meaning of wifehood into a complex figuration as yet unscripted. "Title divine, is mine," however, seems to end on an ambiguous note as it returns toa conventional image in which a female figure finds her greatest enjoyment in "Stroking the Melody" of the words "'My Husband.'" Dickinson's earlier redefinition of traditional womanhood, however, gives these last lines an ironic overtone; for, the

birth-marriage-death trajectory is ironically presented as a "Tri Victory" specified in the catachresis "Born – Bridalled – Shrouded." So the catachreses go two ways: traditional wifehood seems to be heading toward death, while a new creative type of womanhood arrives at an openness and perhaps uncertainty, as suggested by the ambiguity of the dash following "the way." The speaker knows she does not want to finish with the "death" of marriage, and literally puts herself into a space of uncertain open endedness.

In several other poems, Dickinson maps her creative powers through her active appropriation of well-known sexual metaphors: the "Loaded Gun" in "My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –" (Fr764), the "volcano" in "On my volcano grows the Grass" (Fr1743), and the "Lip" in "Could mortal Lip divine" (Fr1456). As critics, including Rich, Gilbert and Gubar, and Joanne A. Dobson, have shown, Dickinson uses masculine pronouns to gain access to aspects belonging to the patriarchal world, including, significantly, "her own creative powers, [that are] unsexing for a woman" (Rich 102). And indeed, it seems natural, as Rich claims, "that Dickinson would assign a masculine gender to that in herself which did not fit in with the conventional ideology of womanliness" (105). Dobson argues that Dickinson's masculine self-genderings realize a part of herself that was necessary but suppressed: the "masculine construct of Dickinson's poetics" is therefore "an attempted realization in her poetic world of her dimly perceived 'masculine' self, the aspect of her psyche that had long been deprived in the real world of recognition and expression" (85). In "The Spider holds a Silver Ball" (Fr513), Dickinson presents a spider creating "from nought to nought." Although the spider is associated with feminine occupations, such as weaving and dancing, Dickinson uses masculine pronouns to refer to it: "He" is "dancing softly to Himself" while "His Yarn of Pearl – unwinds"; Dickinson thus "authors" a new female/masculine sense of creativity.

By synecdochic transfer, Dickinson talks about books in masculine terms as well, referring to an "Antique Book," including one by Sappho, as a "He" in "A precious – mouldering pleasure – 'tis –" (Fr569); the physical object of the book may die away ("moulder"), but will still "tantalize" readers (a feminine coquettish attribute) centuries later. In "This was a Poet –" (Fr446) Dickinson again refers to the creative self by means of a masculine pronoun: "it is He – / Entitles Us." Although this poem seems to "authorize" an arguably female plural "Us" according to lines of heterosexual agency (male activity and female passivity), it also invites a more complicated reading. The male poet uses a humble "familiar species" to make poetry, a reference

that, according to reigning gender conventions points to femininity. However, the object literally seems to become a potential creative subject who not only provides inspiration, but herself becomes inspired as well: "We wonder it was not Ourselves / Arrested it – before." Although the poem ends with a male associated illustration of the creative act of poetry in terms of an uncanny, but pleasurable, experience of circumference, of stepping out of time—"Himself – to Him – a Fortune – / Exterior – to Time"—by implication the implied and indirectly present female subject functions as a ghostly resonance who shares in this catachrestic potential. In "No matter – now – Sweet –" (Fr734), Dickinson's combined male/female persona is indeed literally presented through sound: the rhymes of "Earl" and "Girl" construct a catachresis of a bi-gendered creative self that expresses the poet's belief in her artistic powers. In "One need not be a Chamber – to be Haunted –" (Fr407), Dickinson further complicates the metaphor of "Corridors" in the "Brain" that hide an "Assassin" by playing on the dynamics of haunted chambers in the literal and metaphorical interiority of a "House": it is not a specific location that creates a sense of haunting, it rather emerges from individual "sights" of consciousness. The "Ghost," a "He" again, is thus responsible for the interior drama of a plurality of selves that is at times experienced as unnerving. In an early letter to Susan, Dickinson talks about her "metamorphoses" and poses across gender lines as "Mattie and Minnie and Lizzie"; "King Charles, Sancho Panza or Herod, King of the Jews" (L107); Dickinson thus acts as a flexible, bi-gendered catachrestic subject. Such use of metaphor in order to extend the meaning of existing expressions has been discussed by Fontanier as being a possible form of catachresis: he called this process *catachrèse de métaphore* (214) or *métaphore-catachrèse* (215) and investigated it as a grand type of catachresis proper (214). In metaphor-catachresis, metaphor is used as a building block to construct catachresis. In the above case, the catachrestic self comes about by a series of metamorphoses into personae: Mattie, Minnie, Lizzie, Sancho Panza, and Herod. While metaphors point outside of language, catachresis does not: it merely combines these signifiers to make out the larger catachresis of a plural and changing self. As such, metaphor-catachresis serves a particular function in Dickinson's gender poems: by transgressing the binary oppositions of man/woman, it de-essentializes femininity and "acknowledges" "the play of difference" (Schor 45).[9] "Woman-as-different-from-man" is thus displaced, as Naomi Schor claims, "by the

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[9] This de-essentializing fits into the "re-gendering of hierarchical symbols" that White identifies in Dickinson's poetry, whereby the poet "sweeps away the old hierarchical associations of light and darkness" (75).

notion of internally differentiated and historically instantiated women" (45), Dickinson's "Wife without the Sign," for example.

The diversity of Dickinson's gender performances reveals her stunning understanding of having many selves, multiple personae, that are best represented by the proliferative trope of catachresis. This does not mean, however, that these poems should be read as conventionally autobiographical. For, as Marjorie Perloff notes, Dickinson's writing clearly reveals an "indeterminacy of persons and places" (*Poetics of Indeterminacy* 59).

However, at times it is indeed Dickinson's life that demands expression or justification as she constructs herself as a rebel via catachresis and through the pathos of her sense of singularity. There are "openly confessional poems," in which Gilbert and Gubar identify Dickinson as splitting herself into different personae, giving evidence of "her own psychic fragmentation" (622). At other times, however, biographical readings do not work because, as Weisbuch claims, "the poems are not literal" ("Prisming" 211), and "Dickinson's literal life will not occur in them" (212). Given Dickinson's understanding of "the internal self as plural" (217), the generative trope of catachresis serves her imaginative needs as a woman poet. For, as Barbara Novak puts it, Dickinson "had to *strategize* (her word) with multiple personae to achieve her freedom" (109). Dickinson does not resolve the undecidability between the autobiographical and the rhetorical or figurative; she will not tell whether she is recording things "as they are" (in a constative manner), realizing imagined possibilities (in a performative manner), or rhetorically experimenting with a concept she might plan to put into practice in life. As Juhasz and Miller point out, the poet's subjectivity as staged in a poem is distinct from both the "'I' of everyday speech" and the speaker of the poem: "Dickinson neither describes her speakers in narrative terms nor describes their positions as separate from herself" (109).

Dickinson herself, moreover, suggests that selves all belong to "supposed persons": "When I state myself, as the Representative of Verse – it does not mean – me – but a supposed person" (L268). Dickinson's selves are plural and scattered, in a very particular deconstructive manner, all over "experience," whether "real life" or imagined. Deconstructing, as it were, the presupposed dichotomy between the "real" and the performed, Dickinson instead proposes that "supposed persons" should be taken as the general term, and "me" as a specific term, a subset. Moreover, Dickinson's catachrestic performances of "supposed persons" contribute to the construction of particular "real" selves that her family, friends, and critics have understood to be "poses." Retaining undecidability by making the "supposed person" the primary

term, Dickinson upsets relationships between the "real" and "supposed" and consequently displaces systems that differentiate between them. The constative-performative aporia is thus complete.

In general, this notion of undecidability can be detected in what Ryan Cull calls "the blurring of stylistic and formal lines between poem and letter" (38). Dickinson's poems were often sent in and as letters, while many of her letters served as addenda to poems, and both reveal a significant degree of uncertainty between autobiography and posing. Indeed, in Dickinson's case, as Miller points out, not even the letters can be taken as autobiographical: "one cannot trust that she will represent herself fully or accurately in a letter" (*Grammar* 13).[10] For example, by sending her famous "verbal self-portrait" to Higginson, Dickinson presented herself "as a kind of imaginative creation rather than as a flesh-and-blood woman" (Donahue Eberwein 15). This gesture is thus as much constative as performative: "I had no portrait, now, but am small, like the Wren, and my Hair is bold, like the Chestnut Bur – and my Eyes, like the Sherry in the Glass, that the Guest leaves. Would this do just as well?" (L268). Dickinson here offers a catachrestic construct as a substitute portrait and defers a purportedly non-existent signifier toward another, imagined, or constructed signifier. Dickinson takes an existing expression, a portrait, and extends its meaning to include the description of a wren-like woman with eyes the color of sherry left in the glass of a departed guest. While Dickinson offers a duplicate of sorts of her actual self, she also constructs a catachrestic portrait of her own excessively original intellect. She thus makes this performed subject more "real" than the directly addressed Dickinson of whom the portrait was requested.

Catachresis is a very useful trope for Dickinson because it allows her to put the pointing function of language on hold. It thus allows her to write what Weisbuch calls "sceneless" poetry (*Emily Dickinson* 15–19), poetry without references to the outside world. This is a poet whose verse, as Hagenbüchle states, "displays no 'what,' no overt subject matter," especially not a subject matter that would demand a referential or mimetic treatment. "Dickinson is a non-mimetic writer," Hagenbüchle insists, who "makes almost no use of real-world (descriptive or first-level) mimesis" ("Poetic Covenant" 26). Instead, Dickinson develops a tendency to "collapse the real and the symbolic into one" (16). Or, in other words, the real is collapsed *into* the Symbolic, that is, language. Reality and biography are simultaneously defacilitated,

[10] Lindberg-Seyersted goes as far as to say that Dickinson's poems show greater frankness than the letters (25).

while constative-performative aporias are retained. This is indeed a form of "indirect self-portraiture" (Keller and Miller 547), one constructed by strategies of indirection: Dickinson's "poems stem from her life, but they do not point to it; there is no direct reference to a particular act of the poet or even necessarily to her real voice in the statement or voice of a poem" (*Grammar* 15). However, whether "real" or imagined, fantasized, staged, or performed, poetry still remains rooted in experience.

Expanding the trope

Through catachresis, Dickinson develops a poetics that matches her singular vision of the female subject: a vision previously unscripted in 19th century America. However, this catachrestic poetics was by no means limited to Dickinson's radical and sweeping re-conceptualizations of gender: it also spilled over into poems dealing with other master concepts. Prominent among these are the concepts of God, death, and consciousness.

Dickinson uses catachresis to develop new meanings for the idea of God. In "Is Heaven a Physician?" (Fr1260), the speaker asks whether Heaven—or, by synecdochic transfer, God—is a physician and an exchequer. This question shifts the meaning of Heaven/God to the very concrete and everyday resonances of physicians and exchequers; Dickinson, moreover, adds that God the "Physician" is not a conventional figure who saves lives as he deals with death and that she will also not be "Party to" negotiating with God the "Exchequer" over what she "owes." The meaning of God is similarly shifted in "I never lost as much but twice –" (Fr39); here the speaker, verging on becoming blasphemous, calls Him a "Burglar" and a "Banker." The catachresis of God as a banker and burglar is thus constructed by depriving the word God of its conventional semantic features of goodness and justice. In "God is a distant – stately Lover –" (Fr615), God appears as a remote, hyperbolic lover, who sends Christ, his only son, to earth as an intermediary. Evoking the story of Miles Standish, John Alden, and Priscilla Mullens from early American history, Dickinson here points at a weakness in God, who out of an insurance policy of sorts, sends Christ as His envoy. He thereby risks the alternative presented in the poem: that people—much like Priscilla, who preferred John to Miles—might choose Christ, not God. By offering this alternative of choosing the Son over the Father, Dickinson dares to go against Christian beliefs in her

testing of concepts. In "God is indeed a jealous God –" (Fr1752), God is conceptualized through the blasphemous catachresis of a petty, jealous God, who "cannot bear to see / That we had rather not with Him / But with each other play." Elsewhere Dickinson raises doubts about whether God is the "Father in Heaven" by constructing a catachresis that does not operate by extension but by exclusion: "He [Benjamin Franklin Newton] often talked of God, but I do not know certainly if he was his Father in Heaven" (L153). Here the blasphemous tone arises from semantic shifting: the possibility that "Father" might not be included in the meanings associated with God.

In these texts, Dickinson, through various catachrestic constructions, revises current conceptualizations of God, but at the same time alerts us to a particular feature of language. Using unorthodox images—such as Heaven functioning as a physician and exchequer and God not being a Father—Dickinson surprises her readers into becoming aware that these words are "divisible" and share meanings catachrestically. Names become "right" through the process of deferring or disseminating meanings so that meanings might belong to several "names" at one and the same time. In this sense, catachresis functions exactly in an opposite way to the nominalism described by Perloff in Ezra Pound's poetry, which she defines as being characterized by an "overdetermination of nouns and noun phrases" ("Search" 193). According to Perloff, Pound insisted on the desirability of "prime words—words divisible only by themselves" (198) and the "'right' name—a name that belongs to it alone" (208). Presenting, however, an "underdetermination" of meanings, Dickinson resists such nominalism and instead accepts and illustrates that some words can and do shift meanings in order to fill semantic vacancies.

Dickinson also redefines the concept of death by means of catachrestic expansion. This private redefinition is articulated by a particularly Dickinsonian form of reification: she offers a new definition of death by enthusiastically attempting to pin down the physical experience of dying. Catachrestic extension allows the concept of death to include the state of acute consciousness. Dickinson's famous death poems—"I felt a Funeral, in my Brain" (Fr340) and "I heard a Fly buzz – when I died –" (Fr591)—show her preoccupation with the act of dying. While in 19th century America, the concept of death did include an emphasis on the physical experience of dying, for Dickinson, this experience became a fascinating journey heightened by a renewed sensorial awareness. Convinced that some faculties are sharpened during the process of dying and being curious as to whether awareness

can remain alive after physical death, Dickinson allows the dying a capacity for self-inspection. Dickinson traces the superb intellectual effort of imagining one's own death.[11] No wonder that in these poems, Dickinson comes close to touching rock bottom. However, in "The Tint I cannot take – is best –" (Fr696), death claims—"arrogantly"—to possess a different way of seeing. In "The last Night that She lived" (Fr1100), death adds significance to things otherwise unnoticed: "Things overlooked before / By this great light opon our minds / Italicized – as 'twere." Dickinson thus plays in an expansive fashion on the received opinion that death equals the end of all known things.

Poems on psychological states also provide arresting instances of master concepts that are catachrestically expanded. In "This Consciousness that is aware" (Fr817), Dickinson reimagines the meaning of consciousness and expands it to include a capacity for intense experience as well. In "I never hear that one is dead" (Fr1325) Dickinson presents consciousness in terms of prosopopeia but also includes a syntactically indirect emphasis on how death fixes the face of the dying: "That awful stranger – Consciousness – / Deliberately face." Infinitude also appears as a psychological experience in Dickinson's poetry, whether it is the infinity of the abyss ("Is Bliss then, such Abyss –" [Fr371]), or the recognition of a personified infinitude: "Infinitude – Had'st Thou no Face / That I might look on Thee?" from "My period had come for Prayer –" (Fr525). These poems about personal madness, a disjointedness between time and person, explosive or destructive moments, and moments of anguish are, to use Martin's words, the "excavations of the psyche" (117) of a poet known to have had "the courage to enter, through language, states which most people deny or veil with silence" (Rich 114).

Trying to understand the mechanics of perception, Dickinson also explores levels of consciousness coming after moments of pain or trauma. In "There's a certain Slant of light" (Fr320), the experience of "Hurt" and "Despair" allow for a particular way of seeing, seeing better, with the "Slant of light" revealing internal meanings. Similarly, in "By a departing light / We see acuter, quite" (Fr1749), the sense of loss heightens vision. Elsewhere, however, the intense experience of emotional loss seems to block perception: nerves are dead, feet feel heavy, and the whole experience weighs on the mind like lead. This happens in "After great pain, a formal feeling

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[11] In his 1915 essay "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death," Sigmund Freud points out that it is almost impossible to imagine one's own death. As Freud points out, "Our own death is unimaginable, and whenever we make the attempt to imagine it we can perceive that we really survive as spectators" (289).

comes –" (Fr372), where the experience of numbness will be remembered only later; however, it is the *not* feeling that is felt with a particular violence and sharpness. A little known psychological experience, that of encountering a thought one has had before, is described in the following poem:

> A Thought went up my mind today –
> That I have had before –
> But did not finish – some way back –
> I could not fix the Year –
> (Fr731)

This poem describes déjà vu, or paramnesia, the curious feeling that one is reliving a familiar experience. Dickinson here presents thought as an agent that can sometimes visit the mind: it comes or goes, as it pleases. The mind does not have the ability to control the thinking process; its only job is to remain open and receptive to the honor of thought's visits. Thought, moreover, can deceive the mind: it might give the impression of having been there before. Dickinson performs the figuration of déjà vu through catachresis, a fitting choice indeed: she captures the experience of déjà vu, the illusion of a duplicating experience, with a trope that is similarly built on the illusion of reference, itself a form of duplication. Both establish connections between signifiers only: memories in the case of déjà vu and words in the case of catachresis. It seems that—similar to several of her contemporaries (Hawthorne and Tolstoy, among them)—Dickinson was preoccupied with this unusual psychological phenomenon before it was defined in scientific terms by Émile Boirac in 1876 and Emil Kraepelin in 1886 (see Brown 394).

Where did catachresis take Dickinson, and what did she hope to get out of this journey? Dickinson most probably used catachresis to such an extent because she expected that the creation of a more adequate language in her poetry would enhance the epistemic process whereby meanings approximate truth. As Perloff points out, in this respect, "Dickinson is very much of her time: despite her complex and difficult metaphysic, she believes that poetry *can* articulate truths, even if those truths are to be told 'slant'" ("Emily Dickinson"). Catachresis allows poets to make words more adequate and transport them toward unexpected meanings. This trope opens up an unlimited range of experiments with meanings; with catachresis at hand, Dickinson can do everything except that which is "Unknown to possibility," as she writes in "What I can do – I will –" (Fr641). Dickinson generates new concepts via

catachreses by extending the meaning of existing expressions, allowing us, as catachreses always do, to change the way we look at the world, allowing us to think differently.

Catachresis provides Dickinson with linguistic space for impropriety and subversion, as well as *assujettissement*. When Dickinson writes of circumference as a capacity, woman as a bachelor, God as a burglar, death as a dialogue, or consciousness as a stranger, she speaks "improperly," both semantically and culturally, as she verges outside accepted lexicons and cultural norms. Dickinson's catachreses always suggest a subversion of normativity and thereby destabilize the idea of normativity itself. This impropriety, or subversion of propriety, linguistic and cultural, guarantees that Dickinson's claim that she was "standing alone in rebellion," as she proclaimed at age eighteen in a letter written from Mount Holyoke College (L35), would remain valid throughout the rest of her life as she kept fulfilling (performing) her own *assujettissement*.

Moreover, catachresis matches Dickinson's investment in re-accessing the flexibility of language in order to create new meanings that will facilitate the epistemic process. Words with fixed meanings and tropes anchored in the realm of the signified, Dickinson seems to suggest, lock us into what we already know. Metaphor seems to fit this pattern as it establishes analogies between existing entities and fixed meanings. As powerful as metaphors can be, their power lies not in pushing the limits of what we know, they rather change how we know: how we connect objects and concepts we are already familiar with. The poet, however, relishes in the unfixity, or slipperiness, of meanings. Or, to use much later terminology, the sliding of signifiers, words that are always already other, can help bring different versions of truth within the reach of the speaker. Poetry must, therefore, render and protect, as Raab points out, "the indeterminate meaning of the world and of human existence" (274). And catachrestic slantness indeed has the huge advantage of not eliminating the "unknown," which, as Dickinson writes, "is the largest need of the intellect, though for it, no one thinks to thank God" (L471). Catachresis can articulate different truths by lifting the unknown into language and accepting it as a purely discursive entity: the unthought, or that which has not been articulated or even conceptualized before. Dickinson's catachrestic articulations of circumference, gender/womanhood, God, death, and psychological states keep her "reverence before the incomprehensible" intact; Dickinson can thus retain her two roles as keeper of the known and keeper of the unknown (Lindberg-Seyersted 104).

Although Dickinson might have doubted that given meanings allow speakers to know the world, she does not give up on the possibility of knowing. For her, however, knowledge is not anchored in the world, but in language, and approachable through catachresis, slantness, or "internal difference." Her presupposition is not that truth cannot be known, but rather that truth cannot be known from *out there*, outside of language. Dickinson's answer, then, is to remain within language and to create new meanings by sliding, shifting, and moving existing meanings. The trope for such a proliferative production of meaning is catachresis, which, by permitting meanings to come about through other meanings, can redeem the promise of meaning itself.

PLOTS OF DOMINATION, PLOTS OF RELATIONALITY
On the Triangular Positioning of Characters in American and European Literature

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Purloined Letter" is famously informed by a structure of three's, which structure, together with such narrative components as place, time, and thematic, gets articulated twice as the plot unfolds. In his by now-classic study of the story, Jacques Lacan understands the triangulated signifying chain not only as an allegory of the reading process but as the manifestation of the Oedipal triangle, insisting further that their compulsive doubling makes visible the mirroring process. As a result of Lacan's interpretation, as well as successive reinterpretations of the story by both Lacan and other psychoanalytic, deconstructive, and poststructuralist critics, Poe's short story, with the eternal victim–I interpret the doubling of the triangle and its various narrative constituents as turning the story into a most useful example to demonstrate the complexities of intersubjective relations. Indeed, the story offers varying modes of intersubjective dynamics from fixity to change, in particular, from three-way positions fixed by the geometrical structure to the shifts brought about by the fact that the individual angles can be occupied by various actors.

Poe's most widely known detective story provides a helpful lead into my discussion of triangle structures in literature because it encompasses features that I identify as central to a three-way relationship. Not only is the narrative grounded in triangles with fixed and hierarchical positions as to the persons concealing the letter (Queen/Minister), the unobservant witnesses (King/Police), and the participants who know and either steal it (the Minister), or retrieve it (Dupin), but the seemingly fixed narrative positions get destabilized by the powerful doubling of the triangle. In other words, "The Purloined Letter" is constructed out of a set of two triangles that are each fixed and hierarchical, yet get unfixed and non-hierarchical by the doubling, corresponding in a rather intriguing way to the two triangles I discuss below.

Patriarchal love triangles

The triangle is one of the most common patterns to structure the relations between characters in Western literature. Among the classic triangles one could mention Homer's *Odyssey* (ca. 700 BC), foregrounding the emotional dynamics between

Odysseus, Penelope, and Calypso, and Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1308–1320), building on the triangulation of Dante, Virgil, and Beatrice. Among the triangles involving two men competing for one woman, one should mention the Irish *Deirdre Myth* (8th–9th century), narrating the story of the young princess who is torn between the old king and the young knight; the *Arthurian Legend* (ca. 1095 – ca. 1155), grounded in the triangle between King Arthur, Sir Lancelot, and Queen Guinevere, and most prominently the Tristan romance within the Arthurian legend, relating the love triangle between King Mark, Tristan, and Isolde.

In canonical English literature, the classic triangles—such as Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), and Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847)—typically replay the love-and-marriage plot. Whether one man and two women or two men and one woman form such triangles of desire, it is the man who is allotted more emotional and sexual freedom, as well as agency as to choosing the woman. Compared with the British, canonical American literature has very few triangles that turn on the love-and-marriage plot, or where the two-plus-one structure comprises one or two fixed desiring subjects and one or two fixed desired objects. The most prominent triangles of desire are all flawed in some manner, failing to conform to the classic traits. For example, in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), the two relationships are not simultaneous, preventing Hester from becoming either the desired object or the desiring subject. Edith Wharton's *The Reef* (1912) can be considered one of the few nearly proper love triangles in American literature between George Darrow, Anna Leath, and Sophy Viner, the "other woman," who becomes "the reef" upon which the marriage of Anna and George can be erected. Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove* (1902) develops a plot that soon turns into a travesty of the love-and-marriage plot, with Milly Theale sacrificing herself for the man she desires in order that he may marry her friend Kate Croy, the object of his desire. Although F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), positing two men who compete for the woman whom they consider the prize of success, does come close to the two subjects desiring one object model, here the thematic of the corruption of love by desire for wealth and success seems to alter the genre itself, withdrawing its love-and-marriage plot centrality. *Tender Is the Night* (1934) can be considered flawed in another way, deviating from the classic formula in the sense that here we have multiple triangles, with both Dick Diver and Nicole Diver, his wife, having extramarital affairs and replayed marriages. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955) does turn on a triangle of desire of sorts, with Humbert Humbert desiring two women, but in fact, he uses

the mother, Charlotte Haze, as a means to get to her "nymphet" daughter Dolores (Lolita) Haze. Isaac Bashevis Singer's *Enemies—A Love Story* (1966) puts forward a triangulation of desire that is flawed in yet another sense; here Herman Broder has three women in his life (his wife Yadwiga, his mistress, Masha Tortshiner, and first wife, Tamara Broder), who now form a triangle of desired objects themselves.

The question arises, why are there so few classic triangles in American literature? In order to understand the reasons behind this obvious scarcity of fixed triangular desire plots, I would first like to touch upon two related issues: the scarcity of love-and-marriage plots in general in American literature and the patriarchal features of this particular triangle of desire. Already in his 1960 *Love and Death in the American Novel,* Leslie Fiedler discussed what he called "the failure of the American fictionist to deal with adult heterosexual love" (xi). This is a pattern, Fiedler points out, that is pervasive in American "literature of the first excellence," making it impossible for the greatest novelists to escape (xi). Joseph A. Boone further develops Fiedler's grand claim concerning, as he puts it, "the absence of women, courtship, and marriage in classic American fiction" that provide the "hallmarks of theme and form" and distinguish American literature from the English tradition (961). Boone identifies the prototypical American hero as being a lonely male outside the parameters of his culture, inhabiting "a world largely void of women or normal social regulations" (963). Insisting that this placement of the male hero outside of the domestic sphere is a "radical critique of the marital norms, sexual roles, and power imbalances characterizing 19th century American familial and social life" (961), Boone sees the male quest as involving strong male friendship that makes female presence obsolete. The term "romance," then, gains a special meaning in American literature, referring to the grand life mission of the male quester as opposed to the search for heterosexual bonding. So it seems that the scarcity of love-and-marriage plot in American literature goes hand in hand with the scarcity triangle plots of desire.

But there is another issue at play here, for it is one particular kind of triangular structure of desire that is missing in classic American literature, the one that is informed by what I called classic traits and describe as patriarchal. Such triangles conform to definitions of patriarchy given by Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Girard, Mary Jacobus, and other feminist critics and philosophers.

In his classic text on the foundations of patriarchy, Lévi-Strauss pointed out that the true aim of exogamy in primitive societies was not incest prohibition but rather the extension of kinship and the consolidation of the social institutions of patriarchy.

"The prohibition is less concerned with true consanguinity [...] than with the purely social phenomenon by which two unrelated individuals are classed as 'brothers' or 'sisters,' 'parents,' or 'children'" (29). The real mission of exogamous marriages was to "maintain and widen their alliances" (46): to establish, by the transfer or "exchange of women" (137), new kinship relations, and thereby alliance relations, between the male members of the tribe. As gifts exchanged in this transaction, women—even if considered "that most precious category of goods" (61)—become objectified and reified. "For the woman herself," Lévi-Strauss concludes, "is nothing other than one of these gifts, the supreme gift among those that can only be obtained in the form of reciprocal gifts" (65).

Yet this problem is somewhat more complex. For we cannot insist that the men forming each pair are equals who participate in a relationship of two acting-speaking subjects, and who gain, moreover, power from the reified woman mediating between them. Therefore, I suggest including René Girard's formula proposed for the relations within patriarchy as well. Modifying Lévi-Strauss's triangle, Girard identified the structure of triangular desire in European fiction, presenting cases in which a third person is present when desire is born between two (21). Girard examines forms of desire in gendered power games, understanding desire not as sexual or erotic charge exclusively, but as additionally involving a yearning for power, possession, and domination as well. Three persons participate in the Girardian triangle, each in a different position. Of the two male subjects who own desire, one is the desiring subject, while the other the rival subject; between them there is the desired woman, who is not only the object of their desires but is "the *mediator* of desire, too" (2; emphasis in original). Woman can never be subject in this triangular relationship in the sense that her "value" does not stem from her own self but from the "price" the rival man would be willing to pay for her ownership. This, Girard insists, is the most important trait of triangular desire: that desire does not stem from the subject but from the object, and is produced, moreover, through the rivalry of "two competing desires" (7).

As an instance of real-life triangles, Mary Jacobus cites the story of DNA, dubbed as the iconic "dumb blond" by the male scientists involved. DNA is the object of desire for two scientists who, as in many similar pursuits—from those recorded in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to Freud's analysis of Wilhelm Jensen's *Gradiva*—use the "woman" (whether DNA or the female scientist) as a mediator to act upon their homosocial desire for each other (and the Nobel Prize). Jacobus identifies the manifestation of the Girardian triangle in this situation, where the

man uses the woman as a mediator connecting him to another man. As Jacobus puts it, "The 'pretty' object of desire [...] is pursued less for itself than for being desired by another scientist. The function of the object of desire is thus to mediate relations between men" (99). As such, relations determined by desire are basically triangular, usually with two desiring male subjects and one desired female object. In other words, the normative patriarchal triangle is gendered and informed by power.

Feminist historians and philosophers offer useful arguments for understanding the patriarchal nature of gender relations in texts displaying rivalry for domination. Of these, one should first cite Gayle Rubin's claim concerning the object status of women as "conduits" of relationships between men; women act as one of those "things" that "circulate in exchange—food, spells, rituals, words, names, ornaments, tools, and powers" (35). For this reason, Rubin identifies "the ultimate locus of women's oppression within the traffic in women, rather than within the traffic in merchandise" (37). Heidi Hartman's definition of patriarchy holds equally applicable to triangular relations. Patriarchy, she claims, can be defined as "a set of social relations [...] in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women" (14). This interdependence as well as hierarchy among men and their subordination of women is integral to the functioning of patriarchy; moreover, the interdependence of men and the subordination of women belong to the systemic characteristics of patriarchy. Gerda Lerner's understanding of the "unwritten contracts of exchange" typical in patriarchy is similarly helpful in interpreting triangular relations. Discussing the nature of paternalism, Lerner emphasizes the "relationship of a dominant group, considered superior, to a subordinate group, considered inferior" (239). In patriarchy—defined as "the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children" (239)—women cannot escape male domination, only change, according to "the unwritten contract for exchange" (240), the dominance/ protection of one man (father) for that of another (husband). And finally, the observations of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick also seem applicable to patriarchal triangles. Reflecting on the triangular structure of desire, Sedgwick points out that the relationship between the two rivals is as intense as between the subject and object of desire; that is, love and rivalry may be equally fervent. The desire of the subject is only intensified by knowing that his object of desire is desired by another subject; moreover, the bond between the rivals in such erotic triangles is often stronger than the bond between either one of the desiring subjects and the desired object (23).

Sedgwick insists, furthermore, on the gender asymmetry of triangles, reflecting asymmetrical power relations between men and women. As such, triangular structures duly map the workings of male rivalry for dominance, as well as women's exclusion from power.

Moving on to literary texts, Henry James's "Rose-Agathe" (1878) provides one of the very few American examples of the classic patriarchal triangle as described by Lévi-Strauss, Girard, Jacobus, and the feminist theorists—albeit also flawed in some manner. In the story, Sanguinetti, the American collector, falls in love with the beautiful Rose-Agathe, magnetized by the waxen bust he sees in the shop window of a Paris *salon de coiffeur.* At the same time, Sanguinetti's friend—who is the narrator of the story—falls in love with the woman who Rose-Agathe was modeled on: the wife of the *coiffeur.* Yet the two men do not actually desire the respective objects of their desire; rather, their attraction with the woman—in both its "original" and "copy" version—has the function to strengthen their friendship, the bond between the two men. In this "handbook case of fetishism," as Donatella Izzo labels the story (82), the gaze acts as "vehicle of desire" (86) in the "voyeuristic universe" of men (89) in such a way that woman in both its "original" and "copy" version is reduced to "to fetishistic object" (83) and becomes reified (90). While in one sense the story conforms to the Girardian model, in another, it is also flawed in not fully conforming to it. For although, the two men desire the same woman, using woman as a mediator of their desire to strengthen their own ties, in fact the triangle deviates from the proper triangle in presenting the woman in two versions, turning male desire fetishistic and turning the women into real-life objects, making it hardly any different for the men whether they direct their desires onto living or lifeless objects.

Compared to the above-discussed scarcity of patriarchal triangles in American literature, one Hungarian author stands out in devoting a particular attention to triangles. Indeed, fiction writer and dramatist Sándor Márai (1900–1989) pursued an almost obsessive interest in patriarchal triangles. Three of his works—of which only the last has been translated into English—stand out: written during the short period between 1935 and 1942, *Válás Budán* ('Divorce in Buda,' 1935), *Kaland* ('Adventure,' 1940), and *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* (*Embers*, 1942) all present textbook cases of the triangle structure.

A novel weighed down by dramatic elements, *Divorce in Buda* presents a painful *tête-à-tête* between two old friends, the doctor Imre Greiner and the judge Kristóf Kőmíves. The night before the divorce trial of Greiner and Anna is supposed to take

place, Greiner shows up in his friend's home to tell him that Kőmíves would not preside over the trial the next day since Anna committed suicide a few hours back. She took a deadly dose of sleeping pills most probably because she had been tormented by the fact that by always loving, at heart, Kőmíves and not Greiner, she had provided the legal grounds for divorce: infidelity. What Greiner wants to know is whether Anna's hidden devotion, articulated in her dreams only, was reciprocated: did Kőmíves ever dream of her? In other words, Greiner is really interested in the other man's feelings, inadmissible desires, and sexual subconscious. Their dramatic confrontation is to test the rivalry of the two men, while the woman—left lying lifeless in her home—becomes irrelevant, as if put in parentheses in the story of her own life.

The play *Adventure* reveals an even more obvious triangle structure. Here too, we have a married couple, the medical professor Péter Kádár and his wife, Anna, and another man, Kádár's subordinate in the clinic, Dr. Zoltán, who is having an affair with Anna. Kádár's life is turned upside down by news he receives one after the other: that the lovers are ready to leave him and that Anna has lung cancer, with no more than six months to live. Kádár now devises an intricate plan: not only does he let go of Anna, but works out every detail of their "adventure": he sends them to the Swiss sanatorium of his own choice, covering all their expenses, and literally orders Zoltán to follow his instructions to the last point. It is clear that the dramatic events take place between the two rival men, of which the power figure, Kádár, demands control over all others involved. All the while, the woman lies in her bedroom, sedated, terminally ill, misled. Kádár does not allow her to understand the gravity of her illness, always cutting her short when she demands to know; he similarly silences her when she wants to give him the reasons for leaving him. Denied a voice, her subjectivity is denied as well; for, as we know from Émile Benveniste, language and subjectivity are inextricably connected: it is "language alone [that] establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality; "'[e]go' is he who *says* 'ego'" (729; emphasis in original). As such, the woman drops out of the triangle structure here too, turning it into a binary relationship of two competing men.

Embers is the best known piece of the three, presenting, once again, the painful exchange of two men who had once been best friends. The two men are in their seventies in the novel's narrative present, having carried the heavy burden of the past for forty-one years, ever since Konrád conducted a passionate liaison with Krisztina, Henrik's wife. They have not seen each other since, but now Konrád initiates this final encounter, which Henrik succumbs to, knowing very well that

the three of them are "as inextricably attached as crystals in the law of phys-ics" (250). Yet Henrik, upon learning about their affair, had immediately cut out the woman from their triangular relationship, punishing her by never speaking to her again. With no other outlet to be heard, she had left a secret diary for her husband as a speaking legacy, which Konrád has never opened; now he throws it into the fire before Henrik, irrevocably silencing the woman thirty-two years after her death. Not having allowed the woman to speak, he denied her subjectivity in the sense of Benveniste again: by forbidding her to say "ego," he is forbidding her to be "ego" as well. With the woman deleted from this triangle, what we have left is, once again, the rivalry between the two men. Henrik is less concerned with the woman's emotions or her infidelity than with the friend's alleged betrayal of him. As he says, "Only one thing was incomprehensible: that you had committed a sin against me" (134). Once again, unable to interpret their love affair as anything but an attempt to defeat his competitor, the dominant male deprives his rival of even the memory of their love. And, once again, as the woman becomes silenced and excluded, the triangular structure deflates, flattened into a competition between two male rivals.

Already these short plot summaries reveal that Márai came up with versions of the classic patriarchal structure centered in male competition and rivalry. These triangles are all asymmetrical, hierarchical, with subject-object relationships that are fixed and power- and gender-based. Here the men seem to have been attached to the woman not because they had loved her for her own self but rather because she had been desired by the other man, their rival. In other words, they only view the other man as subject, taking the woman as object only, who mediates between the two male subjects. Indeed, rivalry is a constitutive element in man to man relationships in Márai's works too: Greiner, Kádár, and Henrik all strive hard to attain dominance over Kőmíves, Zoltán, and Konrád, respectively. Typically, this desire to dominate is manifest in their appropriation of language: as dominant males, they all insist on speaking, and on not letting the other speak. Moreover, they repeatedly emphasize that they have triumphed over their rivals in the com-petition for woman.

Márai's triangles seem indeed to conform to the patriarchal relations described by Lévi-Strauss, Girard, and Jacobus, as well as Rubin, Hartman, Lerner, and Sedg-wick. Typically, the triangles are made up of positions that are fixed as well as gendered: two men acting as subjects or agents solidify their bond through a woman who mediates between them, acting as object or patient. These triangles are

informed by power in the sense that the woman is exchanged—as a category of goods or merchandise to be traded—in order that the men maintain and strengthen their alliance. The two men are interdependent rivals in two senses: they strive for domination over each other, while they also compete for the woman, whose value is determined by being the object of desire of both rivals. Their triangles are asymmetrical at two levels: in terms of power asymmetry between the two men and power asymmetry between one of the men and the woman. They all use the woman to mediate between their homosocial bonds for one another. And finally, the relationship between the two rivals is indeed more intense (or significant, relevant, lasting) than that between either man and the woman.

Intersubjective triangles

If American literature is typically poor in patriarchal triangles—and when they do exist, they are flawed in one respect or another—it does abound in another kind of triangular structures, those that I call intersubjective. These structures are based on non-hierarchical subject-subject relations, with unfixed, shifting, changing positions.

Theories of intersubjectivity offer several useful concepts for the definition of intersubjective triangles. The first such concept is recognition. In these triangles, the Other is recognized in the sense Husserl defines the term: as the recognition of other subjectivities based on the understanding that others experience the world differently. In *Cartesian Meditations,* Husserl claims that the recognition of other subjectivities—of the existence and individual aims of others—provides the grounds for all ethical relations. "Within the bounds of positivity we say and find it obvious that, in my own experience, I experience not only myself but others — in the particular form: experiencing someone else" (148). This ethical relation—which includes both recognition and self-recognition, presence and co-presence—acts as the condition for perceiving the world from the perspective of the Other; in other words, as the condition of objectivity. For objectivity—when I realize that my perspective is one of many, therefore, I hold no privilege on truth—is fundamentally intersubjective. We can only experience the world as an intersubjective medium if we also realize that others experience it differently, or if we are capable of transgressing the particularity of our perspective. Otherwise we do not perceive the Other as subject but only as object, the object of our perception.

Interworld provides the second useful concept. The participants of intersubjective triangles occupy the interworld produced by linguistic dialogue as defined by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For it is language that forms the "common ground" between the self and the Other in the "experience of dialogue"; it is language that makes up the "common world," where "our perspectives merge into each other" (354). And although I may never be able to fully understand the Other's perspective—"The grief and anger of another have never quite the same significance for him as they have for me. For him these situations are lived through, for me they are displayed" (356)—we can construct a common ground in which to communicate. This linguistic common ground emerges out of a pact, Merleau-Ponty insists, as the "interworld" that is the project of both participating parties (357).

The third concept is the relational self. Participants in such triangles understand the self as relational, produced by mutual engagements in the sense of the object-relations theory of Nancy Chodorow and Jessica Benjamin. Writing about "the relational construction of the self" (149), Chodorow ties the "search for meaningful subjectivity" (145) to the topic of intersubjectivity. Refuting the Freudian ideal of individuality defined by separation—an ideal tailored exclusively to male autonomy and individuality—Chodorow emphasizes the conceptualization of "the self as inexorably social and intrinsically connected" (158). While Freud's model excludes the role of others in the construction of the self, object-relations theory "directs attention to the interrelations of individuality and collectivity or community" (152) and, as a consequence, to the role mutual engagements play in the production of the self. Benjamin also emphasizes that the traditional psychoanalytic model, valorizing separation and differentiation, is helpful in interpreting relationships of domination only, where the separating party realizes his domination over the person he separated from. "The problem of domination begins with the denial of dependency," she writes ("Master and Slave" 283). This concept of the subject shows a fundamental difference from that of critical feminist psychoanalytical theory, which posits a concept of individualism that balances separation and connectedness, agency and relatedness ("A Desire of One's Own" 282). Benjamin insists that the recognition of female desire—"that one *is* a subject of desire, an agent who can will things and make them happen" (87; emphasis in original)—serves as the precondition of female subjectivity. For the intersubjective mode, Benjamin asserts, "assumes the paradox that in being with the Other, I may experience the most profound sense of self" (92). Breaking with "the logic of only one subject" (*Shadow of the Other* 42), Benjamin's paradigm allows for symmetrical relations between two subjects.

According to Benjamin's intersubjective view, "the individual grows in and through the relationship to other subjects"; for "the Other whom the self meets is also a self, a subject in his or her own right" (*Bonds of Love* 19–20).

Intersubjective triangles seem to abound in the literatures of both Europe and the US from the late 19th century on. In Kate Chopin's "A Respectable Woman" (1894) Mrs. Baroda refuses to be a mediator between the desires of her husband, Gaston Baroda, and his old friend from college, Gouvernail. Although at first she seems attracted by the guest, once she recognizes the chemistry between the two men, a flame that was probably ignited while they were students, she decides to leave in a most "respectable" manner. That is, recognizing the mutual attraction between the two men, she refuses to act as object and mediator between their desires, but assumes agency by extracting herself from their budding romance.[1]

Henry James's "The Story in It" (1902) revises the patriarchal formula differently, reversing Lévi-Strauss's patriarchal triangle by turning the handsome young man, Colonel Voyt, into the object of the desire of two women, Mrs. Dyott and Maud Blessingbourne. The fact that the two women do not use the man as a mediator between their desires for each other also seems to be an alteration on the Lévi-Straussian model.

Among the many British examples one might mention Virginia Woolf's *Night and Day* (1919) with its double triangle structure involving some very modern women; Woolf's *Jacob's Room* (1922) with its permeable sexual triangles; D. H. Lawrence's *The Fox* (1922) and *St. Mawr* (1925). *The Fox* offers the triangulation of two women (Banford and March) and a fox first, to be replaced by the triangle between the same two women and a young man (Henry) taking the structural position of the fox. After the intimate relationship between the two women comes to be broken by the man who now falls in love with March, and after getting rid of both mediators (the fox and the other woman), he folds the three-way relationship into a two-way liaison while reestablishing heterosexual order. Desire is presented as similarly multi-directional in Lawrence's other late novella, *St. Mawr*, depicting the American Lou Witt's desire as it is shifting from her husband to the beautiful stallion. St. Mawr becomes the embodiment of a passion no actual man is endowed with; this is a passion for life that she never experience in her husband. It involves Lou and the fine horse as both subjects and objects, one that she will pursue away from her husband and Europe, as Lou moves to New Mexico with St. Mawr.

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[1]   I am grateful to Réka M. Cristian for drawing my attention to the peculiar character triangulation in this story, as well as in "A Rose for Emily."

Stefan Zweig's *Confusion* (*Verwirrung der Gefühle*, 1926) can be read as a German contribution to the modernist narrative of the intersubjective triangle. In the story of reciprocal desires between the master, his wife, and his disciple, the positions shift as Roland's love of science transforms into a passion, first for the man, later for the woman. Desire seems porous, with positions shifting, allowing all participants to experience subject and object positions alike.

Returning to American examples, Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) may be cited as another example for an anti-patriarchal triangular desire, involving Brett Ashley, Jake Barnes, and Mike Campbell (as well as Brett's incidental lover Pedro Romero). While there are sexual triangles around other characters too, the novel's main focus falls on the erotic interests of Brett, who—as *femme fatale* owning desire—occupies the male position vis à vis the male objects of her desire. The novel reverses patriarchal gender positions, placing woman in the desiring subject position, while passivizing the man (Jake) by his wound received in the manly game of war. While the reversal of patriarchal gender positions shows traces of patriarchy in its absence, Jake's impotence resulting in his non-sexualized/non-eroticized relationships give the final blow to any remnants of patriarchy.

We find a similarly complex and ambiguous triangulation hidden in William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" (1930). Several triangles are presented in the story, among them, that between Miss Emily, her father, and Homer; between Miss Emily, Homer, and the Negro servant; between the father, the Negro servant, and Homer. The three-way relationship that sticks out is the one between Emily, Homer, and the Negro servant. These three characters have a most peculiar relationship, with Emily loving Homer, Homer feeling attraction for the Negro servant (that is why, it seems, he always enters through the "back door"), and the Negro servant magnetized by Miss Emily. That is, Miss Emily, Homer, and the Negro servant alternate in taking the position of subject and object, being either the desiring or the desired one in the various relationships.

In Carson McCullers' *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (1943), we have three nexus relationships, with the three main players (Miss Amelia Evans, Cousin Lymon, and Marvin Macy) taking different gender and sexual positions in each of the three combinations. The relationships are heterosexualized, as Amelia desires Lymon, Macy desires Amelia, and Lymon desires Macy. Yet the heterosexualization of their relationship does not come about through simple gender reversal. Indeed, Amelia will be the lover and Lymon the beloved; one the subject doing the pursuing, the other the object being pursued. Yet Lymon's feminization and Amelia's masculin-

ization seem to go counter to their respective empowerment and disempowerment: it is Lymon the beloved who controls this relationship. Similarly powerless is Macy in being unable to control either his desire or Amelia. In the third relationship, Macy is the feminized pursued who assumes the controlling position, while Lymon is the masculinized pursuer taking the position of the one who is controlled.

The intersubjective triangle has reached new complexities in postmodern fiction. Contemporary American author Michael Cunningham offers two illuminating examples, *A Home at the End of the World* (1990) and *The Hours* (1999), each presenting an intricate web of triangular relations bearing the marks of intersubjectivity that I introduced earlier; among these, the fluidity of positions, relational subjectivity, and the joint creation of a linguistic interworld stand out.

A multifocal novel in which each chapter gives the first-person narrative of a different character, *A Home at the End of the World* beautifully foregrounds triangular relations that inform the three time levels of the plot, relating the adolescent years of Jonathan and Bobby, their college years, and the years of their early adulthood. The story turns on several triangular relations: between Jonathan, his mother Alice, and his childhood friend Bobby; Bobby, Alice, and Jonathan's father, Ned; the new kind of family created by Jonathan, Bobby, and Clare; the nuclear family of Bobby, Clare, and Rebecca; and finally the three gay friends, Bobby, Jonathan, and Erich. All these triangular relations are offered as versions of the family, contributing to their understanding of what family means, and helping them redefine this traditional unit. As Alice puts it, these attachments serve everyone's "*kitschy* [...] yearning for a home" (288). In this novel, triangles are grounded in binary relationships, providing opportunities for intimacies. The most significant binary relationships are forged between Jonathan and Bobby, Bobby and Alice (Jonathan's mother), Jonathan and Clare (who live like brother and sister), Jonathan and Erich (Jonathan's lover in New York City), Bobby and Clare (who have a heterosexual romance), and Clare and her daughter Rebecca (who move out because Clare feels the bond between Bobby and Jonathan is too strong).

Cunningham presents each of the characters as produced relationally, primarily through interworlds created in three-way relationships that allow them to understand the other's perspective. Jonathan's intersubjective valences tie him to his father (whom he as a child idolized for his beauty), Bobby (with whom he initiated erotic play in their adolescent years, and who remains his lifelong love), Clare (with whom they are like brother and sister), and Erich (with whom they are lovers). Bobby asserts his subjectivity through his relations to Jonathan, Alice (with whom he

established a close relationship based on shared interests like cooking), Jonathan's parents (with whom he moved in after their son leaves for college), and Clare (with whom they have a child, Rebecca). Similarly, Alice, Ned, Clare, and Erich all become who they are through their dual and triangular relations connecting them to friends, lovers, and family members. Their positions are neither gendered nor sexualized, but may vary according to the angles they occupy in these duos and triangles. Moreover, their relations are not hierarchical but are based on recognition: understanding that others experience the world differently.

The Hours is another novel informed by trios and triangular structures. Not only do we have the three sections with Clarissa in New York in the 1980s, Laura Brown in the 1950s, and Virginia Woolf in the 1930s (and ending her life in 1941), but have individual characters whose selves are constructed by their positions in triangular relationships. Clarissa's life is structured by a proper triangle of desire: she lives with Sally, but is emotionally attached to Richard, her once lover. Clarissa, moreover, lives in dialogue with Virginia Woolf and her fictional character, Mrs. Dalloway, inscribed by the former and identifying with the latter. Virginia Woolf's life is similarly structured by triangles in the sense that she is married to Leonard, while attached to her sister, Vanessa, and conducting an affair with Vanessa's husband, Clive Bell, as well as Vita Sackville-West. Laura Brown is the odd one out here, not living in an erotic triangle but in one with her husband, Dan, and her son Richie; in this sense, there is no third person in their marriage in terms of desire. At the same time, she does build a rapport with a fictional character, the heroine of Doris Lessing's "To Room Nineteen," through which she finds herself in a textual triangle together with Susan and Doris Lessing; identifying with Susan, she herself is constructed by Lessing. These intersubjective triangles carry very complex webs of relations, with changing-shifting positions and permeable subject-subject relations.

I would like to discuss a recent Hungarian drama as my last example, *Encounter* (*Találkozás,* 1979) by Péter Nádas, a two-character, single-set drama displaying the emotional liaison of three people variously attached to one another. The events on the stage take place in the flat of Mária, a woman now in her fifties. We are in the 1960s or 70s, deep in communist Hungary slowly resuscitating from the trauma of Hungarian Stalinism of the 50s, the revolution of 1956, and post-revolutionary Kádárist terror lasting well into the 60s. Mária is a woman of aristocratic descent, a countess, persecuted in the 50s and now stigmatized and marginalized; hence her extreme poverty shown in her less than modest tiny flat. Soon her invited guest, the Young Man whose name we never learn, arrives, and they begin their slow and

painful conversation. The son of her long-dead lover, the Young Man visits for a heart-to-heart, prompted by the revelation of intimate details by the woman preparing for suicide. Theirs was a peculiar liaison, we learn, back in the early 50s: they had met accidentally, as their paths regularly crossed while they cut through a small square in opposite directions; had their clandestine (and always wordless) rendezvous in barren rooms resembling prison cells. In such a relationship, Mária had no way of knowing that the man was a high-ranking officer in the dreaded ÁVH. Only during one of her routine interrogations, when she was taken by the police (most probably to ÁVH Headquarters, 60 Andrássy Ave) did she come face to face with this most powerful man presiding over one of her beatings. Recognizing that their rendezvous and the beatings took place in the same establishment, she comes to understand the hopeless entanglement of passion and politics in her own life too.

Confronted by the fact that he loves the same (aristocratic) woman whose beatings he had perhaps ordered, but certainly witnessed, the man is beset by a severe crisis of conscience. Emotionally crippled, he commits suicide by shooting his revolver into his mouth in front of the woman. As such, he becomes the victim of the institutional power he served, ending not only his life, but the life of the woman who loved him as well. These are, then, the events recalled during the verbal story-telling of the diegetic level; these are the multiple subtexts that weigh down the play's mimetic structure.

Nádas's triangle is clearly intersubjective. As opposed to the normative patriarchal scenario of Lévi-Strauss and Girard (as well as Jacobus, Rubin, Hartman, Lerner, and Sedgwick), who describe two male subjects in a hierarchical situation, competing for the mediating woman as the prize and emblem of domination, here we have on the stage a man and a woman who both desire the encounter with an absent third. Here all three characters act as subjects (desiring), objects (desired), and mediators at the same time, who need their reciprocal relations for their ultimate life-turning encounter. Each pair in Nádas's triangle has, I want to claim, entered at some point into an ethical relationship with the other in the sense described by Husserl. Mária and the young man participate in a meaningful encounter by entering into social and linguistic dialogue. The young man responds with empathic intentionality to the woman's perceiving eyes by slowly perceiving her too. He becomes able to think and understand the Other, whether the woman or the father, finally reaching, through this experience of perception, a cognitive experience. And out of their linguistic common ground and through their reflective

attitudes, they construct their Merleau-Pontyan interworld made up of revised cultural scripts. For they are both willing to suspend the attachment to the normative scripts which exclude encounters between former paramours and the sons of illicit lovers. Finally, the positions in this triangle between woman, lover/father, and son seem to shift easily, allowing not only the father to act as a medium between the woman and his son, so that the living can meet, but also the son to act as the mediator between the two lovers, one living, and the other dead. So it seems the two encounters meet as well, generating, out of a modest stage set capturing a humble flat, an echo-chamber of relational events.

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In the foregoing, I offered a paradigm for triangular character relations in American and European literature, differentiating between two types of triangles, patriarchal and intersubjective. The primary parameters along which the two types have been set apart are hierarchy, asymmetry, fixity of gendered subject/object roles, and domination vs. non-hierarchy, reciprocity, fluidity of gendered subject/object roles, and relationality. The subject-object relations of patriarchal triangles are characterized by rigidity; their positions are hierarchical, asymmetrical, and fixed in terms of gendered power as well: while men always occupy subject positions, women take object or object–mediator positions, the dominant person insists on his domination over both his rival and the desired woman. Grounded in relations with changeable positions among desiring subjects, desired objects, and mediators of desire, intersubjective triangles are characterized by non-hierarchy, shifting positions, and reciprocity or interchangeability, while the subject's relationality is emphasized. Positions are gendered variably: men and women can equally take subject and object positions, or positions of the desiring, the desired, or the mediator. Desire can be owned by woman as much as man can be the object of desire.

I do not wish to claim that the two types of triangular structures, patriarchal and intersubjective, are mutually exclusive; rather, I posit the two as meaningful formations identifiable among the structural elements of triangular relations. To capture the nature of this relationship, I adopt the succinct observation regarding Freud's *heimlich-unheimlich* relationship given by Pál Hegyi, who points out that the peculiarity of this relationship lies in the fact that, obeying the compulsion to repeat infinitely, the *unheimlich* contains its own opposite, the *heimlich* ("The Weird–Kísérteties mémek" 279). By the same token, intersubjective triangles can be said

to contain, in an uncanny manner, their own opposite, the patriarchal—as if in obeisance of some impulse to infinitely repeating one normative schema within a supposedly dichotomous other. Following Hegyi's diagram (279), then, this is how I visualize the interconnectedness of patriarchal and intersubjective triangles:
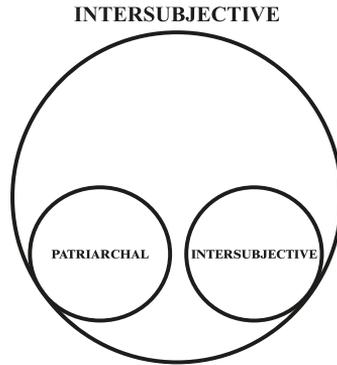
Finally, I believe that, given the fact that patriarchal triangles are made up of binary relations with fixed positions between rivals who compete for domination and who basically strive to exclude women (or at least make them irrelevant), these only look like triangles but do not function as such. Only intersubjective triangles are truly triangular, those based in subject-subject relations, since here the selves mutually engage with each other, experiencing other subjects from fluid and changeable positions. And this can happen even if the intersubjective structure contains, in a most *unheimlich* manner, patriarchal relations.

VERSIONS OF TRIANGULAR DESIRE IN HUNGARIAN LITERATURE
Reading Sándor Márai and Péter Nádas

Triangular structures of desire occur frequently in literature: one loves (desires) two, or two love (desire) one, simultaneously or consecutively. This seemingly simple formula reveals, when placed in the context of other triangles, unexpected complexities. In an attempt to explore these complexities, I examine triangular structures in two Hungarian authors, Sándor Márai and Péter Nádas, who share an intense preoccupation with triangles, whether in the form of a relationship between two close friends and a woman loved by both, or between two lovers and the son of one. Yet their triangles also show fundamental differences: while Márai's triangles are composed by rivalries between two persons in fixed positions, defined by hierarchy and domination, Nádas displays non-hierarchical and non-rival triangular relations with shifting-changing positions.

Márai's patriarchal triangles in two novels and a play

Hungarian fiction writer and dramatist Sándor Márai (1900–1989) devoted a particular attention to triangles. Three such works—of which only the last has been translated into English—stand out: written during the short period between 1935 and 1942, *Válás Budán* ('Divorce in Buda,' 1935), *Kaland* ('Adventure,' 1940), and *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* (*Embers,* 1942) all turn on a most conspicuous triangle structure.

A novel weighed down by dramatic elements, *Divorce in Buda* presents a painful head-to-head between two old friends, the doctor Imre Greiner and the judge Kristóf Kőmíves. The night before the divorce trial of Greiner and Anna is supposed to take place, Greiner shows up in his friend's home to tell him that Kőmíves would not preside over the trial the next day since Anna committed suicide a few hours back. She took a deadly dose of sleeping pills most probably because she had been tormented by the fact that by always loving, at heart, Kőmíves and not Greiner, she had provided the legal grounds for divorce: infidelity. What Greiner wants to know is whether Anna's hidden devotion, surfacing in her dreams only, was reciprocated: has Anna been appearing in Kőmíves's dreams, moreover, has he ever seen Anna's

face while making love to another woman? In other words, Greiner is really interested in the other man's feelings, inadmissible desires, and sexual subconscious. Their dramatic confrontation is to test the rivalry of the two men, while the woman—left lying dead in her home—becomes irrelevant, as if put in parentheses in the story of her own life.

The play *Adventure* reveals an even more obvious triangle structure. Here we also have a married couple, the medical professor Péter Kádár and his wife, Anna, and another man, Kádár's subordinate in the clinic, Dr. Zoltán, who has been romantically involved with Anna. Kádár's life is turned upside down by news he receives one after the other: that the lovers are ready to leave him and that Anna has lung cancer, with no more than six months to live. Kádár now devises an intricate plan: not only does he let go of Anna, but works out every detail of their "adventure": he sends them to the Swiss sanatorium of his own choice, covering all their expenses, and specifically "orders" Zoltán to follow his instructions to the last point. Clearly, the dramatic events take place between the two rival men, of which the power figure, Kádár, wants to control the others involved. All the while, the woman lies in her bedroom, sedated, terminally ill, misled. Kádár does not allow her to understand the gravity of her illness, always cutting her short when she demands to know; he similarly silences her when she wants to give him the reasons for leaving him. Denied a voice, her subjectivity is also denied; for, as we know from Émile Benveniste, language and subjectivity are inextricably connected: it is "language alone [that] establishes the concept of 'ego' in reality; "'[e]go' is he who *says* 'ego'" ("Subjectivity in Language" 729; emphasis in original). As such, the woman once again drops out of the triangle structure, turning it into a binary relationship of two competing men.

Embers is the best-known piece of the three, and the only one translated into English, presenting, once again, a painful exchange between two men who had once been best friends. The two men are in their seventies in the novel's narrative present, having carried the heavy burden of the past for forty-one years, ever since Konrád conducted a passionate liaison with Krisztina, Henrik's wife. The men have not seen each other since, but now Konrád initiates their final encounter, which Henrik succumbs to, knowing very well that the three of them are "as inextricably attached as crystals in the law of physics" (*Embers* 250) [*hármunknak olyan közünk van egymáshoz, mint a kristályoknak egy mértani törvény képletén belül*; *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* 119], as Henrik puts it. Forty-one years before, upon learning about the affair between Konrád and Krisztina, Henrik immediately cut out the woman

from their triangular relationship, punishing her by never speaking to her again. With no other outlet to be heard, she left a secret diary for her husband as a speaking legacy, which Henrik has never opened; now he throws it into the fire before Konrád, irrevocably silencing the woman three decades after her death. With the woman deleted from this triangle, what we have left is, once again, the rivalry between the two men. Henrik is less concerned with the woman's emotions or her infidelity than with the friend's alleged betrayal of him. As he says, "Only one thing was incomprehensible: that you had committed a sin against me" (*Embers* 134) [*Csak egyet nem tudtam megmagyarázni: azt, hogy ellenem vétkeztél. Ezt nem értettem. Erre nem volt mentség*; *A gyertyák csonkig égnek* 68]. Once again, unable to interpret their love affair as anything but his competitor's attempt to defeat him, the dominant male deprives his rival of even the memory of their love. And, once again, as the woman becomes silenced and excluded, the triangular structure deflates, flattening into a binary connection between two male rivals.

Already the foregoing short plot summaries reveal that Márai came up with a peculiar triangular structure. These triangles are unlike the usual love triangles in which one man loves two women or two men desire one woman and which, because agency is typically attached to the men, can be rightly called patriarchal. No less patriarchal, Márai's triangles are nevertheless fundamentally different in the sense that they do not model permanent triangular relations but, with the woman dropping out from these structures, turn into binary structures with two poles only, taken by the two male rivals.

Now I would like to take a short detour to the somewhat abstract field of patriarchy theory as practiced by Claude Lévi-Strauss, René Girard, and some feminist thinkers to show that triangular structures are systemically tied to patriarchy. Lévi-Strauss pointed out that the true aim of exogamy in primitive societies was not incest prohibition but rather the extension of kinship and the consolidation of existing social institutions; the real mission of exogamous marriages, he claims, was to establish, by the transfer of women, new kinship relations, and thereby alliance relations, between the male members of the tribe (*Elementary Structures* 46). As gifts exchanged in this transaction, women become objectified and reified. Girard highlights a more personal aspect of patriarchy when he proposes, based on his reading of European fiction, that a third person is regularly present when desire is born between two (*Deceit, Desire* 21). Of the two male subjects who own desire, one is the desiring subject, while the other the rival subject; between them there is the desired woman, who is not only the object of their desires but is also, as Girard puts

it, "the *mediator* of desire" (2). In such a triangular relationship woman can never be subject in the sense that her "value" does not stem from her own self but from the "price" the rival man would be willing to pay for her ownership. The most important trait of triangular desire is, Girard insists, that desire does not stem from the subject but from the object, and is produced, moreover, through the rivalry of the subjects, of "two competing desires" (7). Feminist historians and philosophers who describe gendered power relations are even more explicit when discussing male alliance and female subjection within patriarchy. Gayle Rubin, Heidi Hartman, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick list among the systemic characteristics of patriarchy the exchange women as merchandise, the ensuing solidarity between men and the subordination of women, the strong homosocial bonds between rival men (often stronger than the erotic bond between man and woman), and the overall gender asymmetry resulting from male interdependence (see Rubin, "The Traffic in Women"; Hartman, "The Unhappy Marriage"; Sedgwick, *Between Men*).

The above abstract claims can be applied specifically to the Márai texts. In all works women are "transferred" in order that the men widen their alliances: Greiner and Kőmíves establish their bond through Greiner's wife, Anna (*Divorce in Buda*); Kádár and Zoltán through Kádár's wife, Anna (*Adventure*); and, most of all, Henrik and Konrád through Henrik's wife, Krisztina (*Embers*). In each case, the men compete for the ownership of the same woman acting as the mediator of their desire. Since women mediate between the men by collecting, as objects, men's desire, I consider women in such patriarchal situations object-mediators. Rivalry is especially eminent in *Adventure* and *Embers,* where the dominant parties of the male pairs, Kádár and Henrik, repeatedly proclaim their superiority, being certain that their rivals, Zoltán and Konrád, tried to win over the wives of their friends only to beat them in the competition. That is, the dominant men take it for granted that the homosocial bond between the men supersedes the desire for woman. The men take their rivals more seriously than their wives: Greiner is more curious about his rival's feelings than about those of his dead wife (*Divorce in Buda*); Kádár conducts business only with Zoltán, not his wife (*Adventure*); Henrik demands answers from Konrád, while he refuses to read the dead woman's diary (*Embers*). Moreover, the value of the woman derives not from herself but from the fact that the rival man also desires her: especially in *Adventure* and *Embers* are the two men attached to the woman because she was desired by the other man, their rival. In other words, the men only view the other man as subject, taking the woman as object only, who mediates between them. Yet not even her mediation is allowed to be an act of agency

(which it could be, as we shall see in the Nádas play): she is made a literal patient (*Adventure*) or is ultimately passivized in death (*Divorce in Buda*, *Embers*). We can also draw the general conclusion, applicable to all of Márai's triangles, that the positions are fixed as well as gendered: two men, acting as subjects or agents, solidify their bond through a woman, object or patient, who mediates between them. Moreover, their triangles are asymmetrical in terms of both power asymmetry between the two men and power asymmetry between man and woman. The core relationships deflate each triangle into a binary relationship between the competing friends or rivals who try either to subordinate or exclude the woman. So the question arises, if the trio comes down to a duo, can these structures be still considered triangles? Before answering this question, I will discuss another triangular structure, the one articulated by Nádas, which will help set the two types apart.

Nádas's intersubjective triangle in one play

In my analysis of Péter Nádas, I will focus on one work only, *Találkozás* (*Encounter,* 1979),[1] a two-character, single-set drama displaying an emotional liaison of three people variously attached to one another. The events on the stage take place in the flat of Mária, a woman now in her fifties. We are in the 1960s or 1970s, deep in communist Hungary slowly resuscitating from the trauma of Hungarian Stalinism of the 50s, the revolution of 1956, and post-revolutionary Kádárist terror lasting well into the 60s. Mária is a woman of aristocratic descent, a countess, persecuted in the 1950s and now stigmatized and marginalized; hence her extreme poverty shown in her less than modest tiny flat. Soon her guest, the Young Man whose name we never learn, arrives, and they begin their slow and painful conversation.

The son of her long dead lover, the Young Man initiated the meeting, we learn, in order that learn about his father: "I just want to know WHAT HAPPENED. To know … I WANT TO HEAR ABOUT MY FATHER," he admits (Nádas MS 13) [*Én csak tudni szeretném, mi volt. Tudni... Az apámról akarok hallani*; "Találkozás" 114–15]. Theirs was a peculiar liaison, Mária recalls, back in the early 50s, when they had met

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[1] The play has been translated into English by Judith Sollosy, but only a part has been published (Péter Nádas, *Encounter*, trans. Judith Sollosy, *Asymptote* [October 2013], http://www.asymptotejournal.com/drama/peter-nadas-encounter/). Citations marked as Nádas MS refer to the unpublished manuscript version of the full text Ms. Sollosy has graciously shared with me, and are given with her kind permission.

accidentally, as their paths crossed every morning as they cut through a small square in opposite directions. They had their clandestine (and always wordless) rendezvous in a room with whitewashed walls resembling prison cells. They never spoke about themselves, never revealed anything about their lives; theirs was the passion of two lovers without names or identities. In such a relationship Mária had no way of knowing that the man was a high-ranking officer in the dreaded ÁVH.[2] Only a few months later, when she was taken by the police (most probably to ÁVH Headquarters, 60 Andrássy Ave), as she regularly was, did she come face to face with this most powerful man, here presiding over one of her many beatings. Now she recognizes that their rendezvous and the beatings regularly took place in the same establishment: "We're in the same house. THE HOUSE HURT" (Nádas MS 67) [*Ugyanabban a házban vagyunk. Fáj a ház*; "Találkozás" 166]. After the lovers meet in the interrogation room, the man's vigor begins to fade, his health deteriorates, he loses weight, and his once healthy complexion turns pallid and sallow: "He had grown thin, though not pale, just some yellow skin on an unfamiliar face" (Nádas MS 71) [*Sovány lett, nem volt sápadt, hanem egy idegen arcon sárga bőr*; "Találkozás" 170]. Confronted with the fact that he loves the same (aristocratic) woman whose beatings he had perhaps ordered, but certainly witnessed, he is beset by a severe crisis of conscience. Emotionally crippled, he commits suicide by shooting his revolver into his mouth right in front of the woman. As such, he becomes the victim of the institutional power he served, ending not only his life, but also the life of the woman who loved him. "He put an end to my life" (Nádas MS 71) [*Befejezte az életem*; "Találkozás" 170], she admits.

While the encounter between the woman and the Young Man make up the actual events on the stage, past events are evoked by the characters remembering the dead lover/father. This recalling of memories opens the encounter between the two characters into an encounter of three, where the woman and the Young Man use the other as a mediator to reach the third, the lover/father. Constructed of acts of sense-making and self-transformation, the play's plot hinges on the interlocking encounters between the two living persons and the dead one, unfolding as the interplay of actual and remembered events. The Young Man admits that he decided to look up the woman because he wanted to hear someone talk—lovingly, perhaps—about his father of whom he, a very small child at the time he died, had no actual memories. For the first several minutes he is uneasy, listening to Mária rather than

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[2]   ÁVH (1948–56), the Hungarian version of the Soviet NKVD, was communism's dreaded repressive agency, known for its brutality and terror.

joining the conversation. In the eyes of the woman, the son seems to have the body of the father; as he says, "I wear my father's body" (Nádas MS 55) [*Viselem az apám testét*; "Találkozás" 152]; this identification triggers the woman into telling her stories. She takes pleasure in narrating the story of her life ('I'm remembering for you" [Nádas MS 12] [*magának emlékezem*; "Találkozás" 112], she says), which, we soon learn, cleanses her for the final encounter with death. Sometimes she gets confused, uncertain of whether it is the past or the present she is recalling, or whether it is the father or the son she is talking with. "These times get mixed up a little" (Nádas MS 49) [*Kicsit összekeverednek ezek az idők*; "Találkozás" 148], she says, feeling disoriented. Soon the Young Man eases up, and talks more and more. Seeing that the woman really listens, he feels encouraged to tell his own stories. Being recognized by the other, and registering this recognition, he takes joy in self-presence. "I'm all here" (Nádas MS 20) [*Nagyon itt vagyok*; "Találkozás" 122].

Having told her story to her lover's son brings relief and a sense of freedom for Mária, which ultimately she shares with the young man in a most peculiar way. Having broken her silence which had kept her prisoner, and having passed on the secret to the son, she feels liberated from the past: "You can't imagine how good it is talking about it. Just plain good. I'll be free at last" (Nádas MS 50) [*El sem tudja képzelni, milyen jó mesélni. Egyszerűen jó mesélni. Megszabadulok*; "Találkozás" 149]. Her forgiveness finds its form in an unexpected act she performs on the Young Man's body as if on the father's: a ritual washing of the dead. After slowly taking off the clothes of the Young Man sitting and then standing over a small washbasin, she starts to wash him slowly and methodically, all the while talking, evoking, in minute details, her final encounter with his father, the one ending in his suicide. The Young Man remains lifeless during the whole ritual: motionless, apathetic, staring into space. Mária acts as agent initiating and performing the ritual, as well as an agent who actively and willingly mediates; as such, she is subject-mediator, one who mediates as subject and between subjects. In this capacity, she brings about the purification of all involved through the ceremonial act of washing the young man's body. First, as a woman bathing the dead, she cleanses her dead lover of his sins, political (he was a high level officer of ÁVH) and ethical-religious (he committed suicide), granting him peace. Second, she purifies the bond between father and son, allowing the son to relate physically to the dead father, to reach, through his own body, a lived recognition with the father he always resisted. Third, after appropriating to herself the status of the wife, who in several religions has the right to wash the body of her husband, the woman prepares her own transition from life

to death. So her purification ceremony is performed as a religious ritual, bringing about yet another encounter: that between life and death. Having invoked and granted full forgiveness to her lover through the narrating of their story to his son and the ritual bathing of the latter, she finally drinks her red wine mixed with poisonous white powder that she had already prepared before he arrived. Thus, she allowed herself to let go of life, "disappearing slowly into the white space" (Nádas MS 72) [*lassan távolodik a fehér térben*; "Találkozás" 171]. She goes gracefully and in peace, ready for the hoped-for final encounter with her long-dead lover.

Recognitions, or subject-subject encounters, play a crucial role in the play because they go counter to our readerly expectations concerning communism and patriarchy. Communism allowed for no shared world for the countess and the secret police officer: communist oppression had created so-called "class enemies" out of them, making sure they would never meet (outside police interrogations and beatings). As to the son's relationship with his father, their worlds were similarly disjunctive: not only because as a small child the son hardly knew his father but also because the son, not being able to accept his crimes as an ÁVH officer, turned against the father. It is not indicated in the play how much the son knew about the father's specific crimes (such specifics are little known even today), but he seems to have known enough to refuse to build an emotional rapport with an ÁVH officer, even if he was his father. Similarly, patriarchal assumptions had to be resisted by both Mária and the Young Man in order to enter into a meaningful encounter with each other. For patriarchal mentalities would make the husband's lover invisible for the man's family, non-existent, to be ignored even decades after the affair. So she needs determination to receive the son, while the Young Man must have also given up his resentment towards his father's mistress. In other words, both the woman and the Young Man must go counter the norms dictated by both communism and patriarchy in order to recognize the Other in a subject-subject encounter. Moreover, the players in Nádas's triangle resist not only the political norms of communism creating disjunctive worlds for "class enemies" and the patriarchal norms demanding that an extra-marital affair remain taboo for family members, but also the normative patriarchal scenario of two male subjects competing for the mediating woman as the prize and emblem of domination (as it appears in the works of Márai). Here we have on the stage a man and a woman who both desire an absent third. Here at one point or another, all three characters act—or are remembered as acting (as the father/lover)—as subjects (desiring), objects (desired), and mediators (passive object-mediators and active subject-mediators). Therefore, I read Nádas's triangle

as intersubjective, based on shifting-moving subject-object and subject-subject relations.

As opposed to the fixed and gendered positions of the Márai plots, the positions in this triangle between woman, lover/father, and son seem to shift easily, allowing each character, independent of their gender, to take up subject and object positions alike. Let's see how this is done in each relation and for each character. As to the father, his lost subjectivity (lost when he recognized his object position in the political machinery) is restored, decades after his death, by the narrating and mediating woman and the son lending his body to the father in the ceremonial washing. The father's memory acts as a passive object-mediator between his son and the woman, while the son, gaining agency through initiating the meeting with the woman, is a subject-mediator between the two lovers. Mária offers herself as a medium by inviting the lover/father to speak through her. By narrating past events to the son, she performs a face-giving ceremony, thereby granting subjectivity to the man who had "lost face" both metaphorically and physically: metaphorically before his son for his political crimes and physically when he shot himself in the mouth. That is, once again Mária acts as a subject or agent, who in turn also confers subjectivity to the two men.

In the play's emotional climax of washing, the experience of tactility informs the most intense intersubjective relation. While it is meant to reach out to the dead father, the woman's physical touch transforms the young man. By a manumission of sorts, Mária performs the act of vindication, liberating the person who, as the metaphorical slave of an oppressive state apparatus, was stripped of his freedom, both political and emotional. This is also part of the closure she brings about, both for herself and the Young Man. Ultimately, it is these recognitions and encounters that turn the play evolving through intertwining narratives into what the author called "the most beautiful love story in the world" (Nádas MS 57) [*a világ legszebb szerelmes története*; "Találkozás" 155].

Conclusion

In my essay I have differentiated between two pivotal triangular structures: patriarchal (characterized by hierarchy, fixed positions, and rivalry for domination) and intersubjective (characterized by non-hierarchy, shifting positions, and reciprocity/interchangeability). The primary parameters along which the two types can be set

apart are fixity vs. fluidity of gendered subject/object roles. On the one hand, we have patriarchal triangles characterized by being binary relations, whether we consider rival relations or erotic relations. Positions are fixed: the dominant person insists on his domination over both his rival and the desired woman. Positions are also fixed in terms of gender: men always occupy subject positions, while women take object or object-mediator positions. The relations are hierarchical and one-directional subject-object relations. On the other hand, intersubjective triangles comprise relations with changeable positions among desiring subjects, desired objects, and mediators (object-mediators and subject-mediators alternatively). Positions are also gendered variably: men and women can equally take subject and object positions, or positions of the desiring, desired, or mediator. Desire can be owned by woman as much as man can be the object of desire. These intersubjective relations are non-hierarchical, based on the recognition of the Other as subject.

I do not wish to claim that the two types of triangular structures, patriarchal vs. intersubjective, are mutually exclusive; rather, I posit the two as meaningful formations identifiable among the structural elements of triangular relations. To capture the nature of this relationship, I adopt the succinct observation regarding Freud's *heimlich-unheimlich* relationship given by Pál Hegyi, who points out that the peculiarity of this relationship lies in the fact that, obeying the compulsion to repeat infinitely, the *unheimlich* contains its own opposite, the *heimlich* ("*The Weird*– Kísérteties mémek" 279). By the same token, intersubjective triangles can be said to contain, in an uncanny manner, their own opposite, the patriarchal—as if in obeisance of some impulse to infinitely repeat one normative schema within a supposedly dichotomous other. Following Hegyi's diagram (279), then, this is how I visualize the interconnectedness of patriarchal and intersubjective triangles:

INTERSUBJECTIVE

PATRIARCHAL INTERSUBJECTIVE
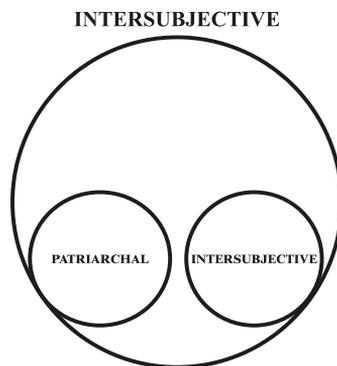
Finally, to answer the question I posed earlier in my essay, I believe that, given the fact that patriarchal triangles are made up of binary relations with fixed positions between rivals who compete for domination and who basically strive to exclude women (or at least make them irrelevant), these only look like triangles but do not function as such. Only intersubjective triangles are truly triangular, those based in subject-subject relations, since here the selves mutually engage with each other, experiencing other subjects from fluid and changeable positions. And this can happen even if the intersubjective structure contains, in a most *unheimlich* manner, patriarchal relations.

THE *DOUBLE ENTENDRE* OF SEX
Pornographies of Body and Society in Péter Esterházy's Fiction

Vulgarity, filth, and ugliness are heavily foregrounded in Péter Esterházy's fiction, contributing to a pornographic representation of sexuality, reflecting a reinforced and exaggerated system of gender and sexual domination. Whenever bodies and acts are described, they seem to come with a double meaning, referring both to themselves and something else. Esterházy's depiction of sexuality is overwhelmingly pornographic, involving bodies that are repulsive and sexual acts that are exploitative; moreover, the language used is blatantly sexist, reflecting a patriarchal male perspective. Framed by the figure of the *double entendre*, this sexist-pornographic discourse is then coupled with a discourse on politics and sexual politics, with the depiction of power dynamics running through all.

Back in the 1990s Hungarian feminist critics were challenged to reflect upon Esterházy's at times one-dimensional gender discourse (*nem különösebben összetett maszkulin szólamok* ['not particularly complex masculine registers']; Palkó 89) and the provocative narrative assignment of gender roles (*a nemi szerepek tematizálásának pikantériája* ['the piquancy of his thematization of gender roles']; Szirák 68). Indeed, there are certain of his works where women and the acts they engage in are overwhelmingly described as vulgar, filthy, and ugly. Fucks and cunts abound; boobs, hooters, loose vaginas loom large; female fatness and the overall *meghatározhatatlan rettenet* (*Egy nő* 81) ['unspeakable dread'; *She Loves Me* 85–86] of the female body weigh down the narrative. What women do is ridiculed—with the usual Esterházy playfulness and wit—as offensive and low, whether eating, drinking, having sex, or performing fellatio. Female bodily repulsiveness, moreover, is sometimes described from a classed perspective, with female grossness as an inherent feature of the *proli* ['prole,' 'white trash'], as the narrator of *She Loves Me* puts it, claiming that female obesity is as much the sign of the Hungarian lower classes as of the American (*Egy nő* 79; *She Loves Me* 84-–85). Even in his final non-fiction work, his cancer diary, the author invents such feminine or feminine sounding diminutives for the pancreatic cancer that would ultimately kill him as *Hasnyálka, Édes kisasszony*, or *Mirigyke* ['Little Pancrie,' 'Sweet Lady,' 'Glandulie'; *Hasnyálmirigynapló* 24, 30, 87], gendering the deadly enemy as feminine.

Emphasis on female grossness and lowness, like all attributes assigned to men and women, derive from the sexual political codes operative in discourse. I use the

term "sexual politics" and its derivatives in the sense introduced by Kate Millett (23, 24), where the term "politics" refers to "power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another," and "sex is a status category with political implications." Sexual relations need to be understood, Millett (24–25) insists, along the lines of Max Weber, "as *herrschaft,* a relationship of dominance and subordinance." Sexual political codes can be located in the foregrounding of the assumptions that are taken for granted, or naturalized. Indeed, as Nóra Séllei (113, 119) points out in a different context, it is because the codes have become so "natural" that we hardly notice them; that is why the critic must unearth the *hátborzongató elszólások* ['uncanny slips of the tongue'], as she does, in the writings of a politician, a philosopher, two literary critics, and a journalist. But in Esterházy's case, no such textual archeological digging is necessary, for instead of hiding the gendered codes, he emphatically foregrounds them, either in total seriousness or in parody, which also reads as deadly serious. Here the critic must interpret this excessive foregrounding and identify the sexual political codes hidden in the parody parasitic on the discourse of sexism.

In what follows I will discuss the double meanings of pornography in two works by Esterházy. I claim that the narrative of *A Little Hungarian Pornography* is grounded in the figure of the *double entendre* in that pornography always has two interpretations, referring to both sex and politics. Because sexual codes duplicate political codes, wherever one is mentioned, the other is evoked. This doubleness runs through the narrative: Esterházy seems always to mean, or "understand," both. Here the *double entendre* has the function to elicit laughter by evoking the Central European *Witz* ['joke'] tradition. In *She Loves Me,* pornography as *double entendre* consists in referring to both female repulsiveness and male powerlessness, while it also acts as a discourse shared by all the permutational alternatives given by the unreliable narrator. In each case, pornography is used as encompassing those gendered cultural codes that inform the patriarchal or sexist social discourse of a particular sexual politics. Esterházy ridicules these deep seated gendered codes by unearthing them from the deep structure of social discourse and making them visible. His display is excessive, with parody shuffling between the two meanings in which he demands pornography to be understood.

A *Little Hungarian Pornography*: Hungarian communism as pornographic

Kis magyar pornográfia [*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 1984, Hungarian / 1995, English] is the representative product of the 1980s, from the last decade of the era (1956–1989) marked by the figure of János Kádár, First Secretary of the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, when Hungary was supposedly the "happiest barracks" in the communist camp. As one of those books that are, as Esterházy puts it, "irrevocably the prisoners of the time in which they were written" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* v), *A Little Hungarian Pornography* abounds in specific linguistic markers that evoke the period of Hungarian communism spanning from 1948.[1] The book foregrounds the anomalies of Hungarian Stalinism of the fifties, marked by then First Secretary Mátyás Rákosi. This was a topic that communist censorship opened in the eighties, allowing writers to criticize Kádár's predecessor as despotic and autocratic in order to emphasize Kádár's "socialism with a human face," as it was called at the time. What communist leadership did not foresee, however, was that by ridiculing the past (the Rákosi regime), some authors would also ridicule the present (the Kádár regime). This is exactly what Esterházy accomplished by using the trope of the *double entendre*: via a transfer of meaning, he would have his readers laugh at the absurdities of both the Rákosi era and "the overripe period of the Kádár era," as he puts it, both exhibiting blatantly "pornographic circumstances" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* v).

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[1] Linguistic markers clearly evoking communism include formulae of contemporary politicians ("with [...] the wiser than wise counsel of its honorable and highly qualified leaders," *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 4; *tisztességés rátermett vezetői bö-ö-ölcs irányításával*, *Kis Magyar pornográfia* 10), official bureaucratic language ("he has a very responsible job," *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 6; *felelős munkakörben dolgozik*, Esterházy 1984: 12), and the much favored use of commonplace language panels ("the problem lies hidden someplace else," *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 64; *valahol egészen máshol búvik meg a probléma*, Esterházy 1984: 12). Other historical-linguistic markers comprise references to ÁVÓ officers (*ávós* [belonging to the communist secret police), the ÁVÓ headquarters (*Andrássy út 60*), the Stalin Bridge, or policemen typically "morose, irritable and frustrated" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 3) [*rosszkedvű, mogorva, túlspannolt, frusztrált*; *Kis Magyar pornográfia* 8]). References to workers' hostels [*munkásszálló*], the League of Young Communists [*KISZ*], trade-union hostels [*SZOT-üdülő*], farmers' coops [*téesziroda*], "window" in the passport [*ablak*] (allowing its holder a single exit from the country), workers' brigades [*munkásbrigád*], and state-operated package tours [*IBUSZ-út*] clearly evoke the sixties and seventies in Hungary, together with mentions of Trabants and Pobyedas, restaurants with linoleum-tile floors, iconic undershirts [*atlétatrikó*], and fur panties [*bundabugyi*].

A Little Hungarian Pornography is a loose compendium of anecdotes from the decades of fifties totalitarian communism. Interspersed with the more public anecdotes are the personal stories with implied male (and less frequently female) narrators, who record what they see. Other than the shared historical period, no unifying frame holds together the individual sections: the work has no linear plot with recurring characters engaged in the narrated events. Esterházy grounds his narrative in the Central European genre called *Witz* in German ['joke,' or *vicc* in Hungarian], a short funny story with a conspicuous double meaning. Usually told by the little man, the *Witz* is intimately tied to Jewish humor, having flourished at times when this little man suffering from political oppression, who was discriminated against, or simply could not say what he wanted to say. In Central Europe, the *cabaret* with its stand-up comedians served as the public stage of the *Witz*. But it was a private genre as well, told cautiously among friends, since its requisite double meaning provided outlets of comic relief during dictatorships, Nazi and Communist alike. Esterházy evokes the *Witz* tradition by always saying one thing and meaning another. Yet he also revises this tradition by consistently employing the figure of the *double entendre,* creating a *double Witz* of sorts, where the two components each have double meanings. To translate the French term literally, the figure of the *double entendre* not only allows a word or phrase to be "understood" in its "doubleness," in a tone that is both humorous and serious, but also exhibits the specificity of reciprocal duplicity. The *double entendre* differs from the *Witz* in being informed by a sense of "bothness," so to speak, where the author means both what is said and what is implied. As such, the *double entendre* bears a family resemblance to parody, which, as Keith Oatley (48) claims, is a "mode of play in which something is both itself and something else." It is exactly this double meaning and double tone, as well as the bothness of meaning something and something else, that Esterházy's text exploits, making it possible that we laugh both at the stories of sex as cover stories for politics and at the stories of politics as cover stories for sex.

In several instances of the *double entendre*, sexual and political references are so thoroughly intertwined that it is impossible to separate them. One passage, for example, presents the policeman kissing his rubber stick. "Once upon a time there lived a cop, and once this cop, for reasons that must remain obscure, kissed his stick" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 2) [*Élt egyszer egy rendőr. Ez a rendőr egyszer, volt rá oka, megcsókolta a gumibotját*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 8]. In the decades of communist totalitarianism, the police was the most visible, therefore most hated, a cog in the machinery of state oppression, the arm put in the service of total power.

Although Hungarian police was armed with guns too, the policeman's baton was the most common tool of everyday police brutality, always at hand to intimidate or, for that matter, to beat up citizens, often with no particular reason. In this context, the policeman who kisses his "stick" expresses his delight in his oppressive power; at the same time, given the phallic associations of the stick, the policeman also swells with pride in his sexual power, which seems inseparable from political power, and as such can also be used as a means of oppression. In several anecdotes of *A Little Hungarian Pornography,* communist functionaries demand sexual pleasures from those they dominate politically. The "officer" on the train enters into casual sex with a stranger, expecting the woman to oblige without hesitation. However, of course, it is not the person she cannot resist but rather the "officer" behind the man, who can be either a military, police, or secret police officer, a representative of political oppression in either case. Moreover, she is quite impressed by his decorations, noticing that his medals sounded at his every move ("The decorations on his chest jingled every time he [*self-censored*]" [*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 15]; *A kitüntetések összecsördültek, valahányszor [öncenzúra]*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 22]).

In some cases, political references are to be understood as also having sexual connotations. The vocabulary of Marxism is expanded to apply to sex in the part where the Hungarian-born opera singer with a career in foreign opera houses makes a pass at First Secretary Rákosi; here the woman is described as "the little Hungarian working girl with the international experience" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 53) [*A kis magyar munkáslány internacionalista tapasztalattal*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 63], giving Marxist "internationalism" a *double entendre* of sexual experience with foreigners. Most often, the actors of sexual encounters are party members, party functionaries, and party leaders, who repeat well-known party slogans with double meanings, such as *a demokrácia fejlesztése* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 36) ['the advanced state of democracy'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 28), *társadalmi kielégülés* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 37) ['social satisfaction'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 28], and *az ilyen heves átalakulások járhatnak fájdalommal* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 37) ['such vehement transformations can be accompanied by pain'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 29], where the political catchline always has sexual connotations (here referring to the progress of a sexual relationship, sexual satisfaction, and the pain of sex). In other instances, sex serves as the currency of social commerce. This happens, for example, on the "luxury" boat used on the Danube and Lake Balaton, carrying three naked girls who have been taken

advantage of by their bosses with the promise of a pay raise (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 18–20; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 27–28). The dominant themes running through such relationships, the narrator claims, are politics combined with sex, or *szociális érzékenység plusz petting* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 32) ['social responsibility plus petting'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 24].

Sexuality understood as both sexuality and politics provides the overwhelming majority of Esterházy's *double entendre* in *A Little Hungarian Pornography.* This presentation of sexuality is unashamedly sexist, suggesting that sexual relations in a totalitarian regime are as controlling, oppressive, and dehumanizing as political ones. The codes that make up this sexist discourse include such topoi as female ugliness, the female body, especially breasts, buttocks, and genitals, as well as repulsive sex. Woman is overwhelmingly presented in negative terms, as ugly and deficient, as the following examples testify: "The lady is not only unsightly but repulsive?" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 146) [*A lady nemcsak randa, de gusztustalan is?*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 171]; "the girl's hair being sour and foul-smelling, a sticky, stiff ringlet flaps against your cheek" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 147) [*a lány haja savanyúan büdös, egy ragadós, kemény tincs birizgálja az arcát*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 172]. The implied narrator is constantly preoccupied with the female body, picking out the woman with the big nose (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 178; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 206) and the one who is *sápatag, vékony lány* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 229) ['pale and skinny'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 198]. He seems obsessed with female breasts, elevating them into the primary distinguishing feature of the person who sits behind her *teli csöcsöcskéi* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 21) ['behind her two hooters'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 14], calling the woman simply *a mellek gazdija* (*Kis magyar pornográfia* 31) ['the owner of the boobs'; *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 23]. Unable to get over the fact that she has inordinately huge breasts ("I'd never seen boobs so huge before," *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 23; *Életemben ekkora melleket nem láttam, Kis magyar pornográfia* 31), the narrator describes the breasts as overwhelming, approaching "boosiasm" ("each of these was a real live boosiasm to boost your enthusiasm," *A Little Hungarian Pornography* 23; *valódi izgő-mozgó csöcs volt, Kis magyar pornográfia* 31).

Esterházy presents sexual pornography from a male sexist perspective, from the position of the male pornographic gaze. The narrative captures the women in humiliating positions, recording the narrator's infatuation with both breasts and buttocks:

"When Ilon stands over me on all fours the domes of her breasts hang down, down, she wiggles her rear end vigorously, her boobs dangle" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 62) [*Ha Ilon négykézláb áll fölöttem, a melle kupolái lógnak le, lefelé; erősen rázza a farát, a mellek lengenek; Kis magyar pornográfia* 72].

The narrator's fixation on the female genitals offers a similar source of twisted humor. For example, we read about the dutiful wife who accepts the husband's complaint that her vagina is too loose that "it feels like a musician playing in a concert hall too big for his purposes" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 7) [*Azt mondja az uram, bő [...] úgy tetszett, mint egy muzsikus, aki túl nagy koncertteremben játszik; Kis magyar pornográfia* 13], and for this reason puts up with his affairs, willing to sleep with the kids while in their bedroom the husband has sex with the other woman. In order to boost the husband's pleasure, she also complies with his wish to do pelvic exercises to tighten her vaginal muscles, "for a woman's cooch, like a fortification by soldiers or a honeycomb by bees, is circled all around by muscles" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 7–8) [*merthogy a nő picirije, akár egy vár katonákkal vagy a lépes méz méhekkel, izmokkal van körülvéve; Kis magyar pornográfia* 14]. Compared to the recurring recitations of female ugliness, especially where the female genitals are concerned, male genitals are paid way scanter—and certainly more respectful—attention in this work. In one place, a man, Gyurka Nagy, having a huge penis is described as

the proud owner of a huge ~; we men slapped him on the back as if he had done well by us [...] Enmeshed by a wild growth of thick, swelling veins like so many mistletoes that held it in thrall, it was strong and wide like a haycock's" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 63) [*Gyurkának hatalmas vesszeje volt – férfiak viharosan veregettük a vállát, mintha, úgymond, kitett volna értünk [...] erős és széles, mint egy petrencerúd, a kék, vastagon dundorodó erek vadul körbefonták, akárha fagyöngy, szinte szorították; Kis magyar pornográfia* 74–75]

Labels and synonyms are tactfully avoided, in fact, substituted for by the swung dash or tilde, as if out of shyness or bourgeois decency.[2] Only a basic classification

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2   As seen from the cited passage, the American translator inserted the tilde in another sentence than the author did in the Hungarian original; this is an accepted technique of translation, called stylistic compensation.

is offered, differentiating between "the wiener" and "the whamdanger" (*A Little Hungarian Pornography* 63) [*vér~ és hús ~*; *Kis magyar pornográfia* 75].

Discrepancies between depictions of the female and the male body are telling elements of the gendered code: woman is predominantly the object of the narrator's gaze, while he, the male narrator, takes the subject position, only rarely objectivizing the male body (the case of Gyurka Nagy being an exception). The narrator routinely sizes up women, subscribing to the traditional codes of gendered representation in the sense Susan Bordo (173) defines the basic formula of this attitude, to the effect that "men are not supposed to enjoy being surveyed, *period.* It's feminine to be on display." A wealth of descriptions relate to female corporeality, while male looks get disproportionately scanter narrative attention, and when they do, this attention is considerably friendlier. The few times when the male body is surveyed, its positive features are emphasized. The same features receive different interpretations: while with regard to men, "bigness" is a positive feature, with regard to women, huge breasts and loose vaginas contribute to the woman's ugliness.

Gender discrepancies do not make it easy for women readers to laugh through *A Little Hungarian Pornography*. Esterházy's female readers are often "resisting readers," to apply Judith Fetterley's by now classic term, in the sense that they have difficulties identifying with the male perspective. In (American) literature, Fetterley (xii) observes, "the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded [...] she is required to identify against herself." The American critic's words seem to hold true for the reader of Esterházy's prose as well, in particular, for *A Little Hungarian Pornography*: while appreciating the humor and the irony, the woman reader has to identify with either the male subject position of the narrator or the female object position of women portrayed—not to mention the filth, ugliness, and vulgarity marked as part and parcel of female existence. Although the *double entendre* of female vulgarity and abusive sex evokes vulgar politics and abusive political exploitation, we must remember that like metaphors, double meanings also hide presuppositions, preconceptions, and bias. As such, they are not, as Séllei (123) emphasizes, "innocent." Indeed, it is always women whom Esterházy presents as ugly and repulsive, and it is always female sexuality that is depicted as pornographic. It is therefore no wonder that although women readers may also laugh at Esterházy's irony and humor, they laugh with a certain resistance, fully aware of the fact that humor operates at their expense.

The *double entendre* mode should not be understood as establishing one-to-one correspondences. I am not suggesting, for example, that a direct equivalence should

be set up between the woman's willingness to tighten her loose vagina and, let's say, a possible willingness to comply with any desire of the oppressor, for such direct correspondences would only offer a simplistic interpretation of *double entendre* humor. Esterházy devises a more complex method when constructing a discourse detailing the features of what he terms pornography: among them, degradation, exploitation, abuse, humiliation, corruption. He then assigns these features to both political and social conditions, bringing them together in the figure of the *double entendre*. Humor derives from the often surprising coupling of these conditions via the common feature of pornography, where the reader is expected to laugh simultaneously at both repulsive sex and communist politics.

She Loves Me: permutations of male and female vulnerability

Egy nő [*She Loves Me*, 1995, Hungarian / 1997, English] is a first-person account of ninety-seven individuals—or one individual in ninety-seven incarnations—who love and/or hate the male narrator, and who have (are having) sex with him. This text made up of ninety-seven short sketches has an unreliable narrator grounding it in unresolvable ambiguities. For this reason, I offer three different readings, of which two are thematic and one rhetorical. The thematic readings touch upon the double thematics of sex, while the rhetorical reading unpacks the structural *double entendre* of the text.

Assuming that a fictional text can act like a sentence with its own topic–comment structure, my first thematic reading posits that woman is the topic, while the features applied to her description and the stories related constitute the comment part of the narrative. The short sketches are given by one anonymous male narrator in the position of the speaking subject, while woman as a generic entity is put in the object position in the accounts about the male narrator engaging in impersonal sex with female partners whom he leaves anonymous. The narrator feels no empathy for women; he uses them as sex objects for his own satisfaction. The parody is based on excessive repetition, each revealing the hidden cultural codes and emphasizing that, blinded by his misogyny, the narrator sees women as embodying a wealth of corporeal pathologies. His partners are put on display as objects of the male narrator's gaze, where they are seen as beautiful and ugly, young and old, active and passive, assertive and submissive, bitchy and docile, but mostly easy, loose, or as Bram Dijkstra (5) calls such women "idols of perversity," "not-so-ideal women."

What these negatively described women share, however, is that they all described as loving and/or hating the narrator, while the latter rarely mentions that he himself loves particular women. When he does do so, he doesn't fail to add how that particular woman nevertheless bores him: "I love her. Right now I'm sick of her body [...] I'd rather beat my meat" (*She Loves Me* 151) [*Szeretem. Momentán unom a testét [...] Kiverem a farkam inkább*; *Egy nő* 137].

The narrator classifies his female partners according to how he judges the quality of the intercourse he has had with each. For example, #9 is "a great lay. Fucks like an angel" (*She Loves Me* 19) [*Jól szeretkezik. Magyarán istenien baszik*; *Egy nő* 21], while sex with #8 is described as *személytelen élvezet* (*Egy nő* 19–20) ['impersonal carnality'; *She Loves Me* 18]. The narrator forced woman #11 to give him a blow job: "I forced her to take me in her mouth" (*She Loves Me* 24) [*kényszerítettem, hogy vegyen a szájába*; *Egy nő* 25]; #14 seduces him wherever she sees him; at such times her desire is overwhelming ("She can't live without me. She needs me. I must help" [*She Loves Me* 34]; *Nem bírja nélkülem. Szüksége van rám, segítsek* [*Egy nő* 34]). Most women are passionate with the narrator, which he recounts with pride. For example, #4 is infatuated by his name, while #96 is attracted to his penis, unable to control herself in its presence. Other women are described as learned and intelligent in their peculiar ways (#5, #7); some exhibit gender ambiguity (#50), while another is actually a man who takes the place of the woman (#93). The single section in which a man is put in the position of the women is the odd one out in the sense that here the partner is not described the usual way as an object or spectacle—with a focus on the body, especially the genitals, and the way of love-making—but as a subject with a voice. #93 is, in fact, the only person who the narrator quotes, citing over two pages from his letter about the deep love he feels for the narrator. In other words, the only person who is a speaking subject in this exhibition of women is a man.

Throughout, *She Loves Me* constructs a discourse of subjection of the female to male desire by repeatedly showcasing the female body as the vulgar object of the gaze. It is the male gaze that seems to turn female corporeality into spectacles of ugliness and repugnance, whether of foul mouth odor, loathsome texture of the flesh, gruesome big feet, hairy armpits, dreadful face behind the glasses, or overall obesity. Especially the female genitals fill the voyeuristic spectator with disgust:

> A horrible spectacle, a howling crater, like an explosion. You'd think a tiger had mauled it. You could almost see the parallel destruction of its lethal claws"

(*She Loves Me* 91) [*Iszonyatos látvány [...] vad kráter, akár egy robbanás. Mintha tigris marcangolta volna szét. Az ember látni vélte a karmok párhuzamos pusztítását*; *Egy nő* 87].

The narrator also expresses an ultimate horror over female fatness, which he considers a definitive part of woman's ugliness (#39). Not only does he describe female obesity as ugly and repulsive, but also as lower class. By presenting fatness as the vulgarity of the *proli* ['prole'], he performs a classist gesture, linking Hungarian female obesity, moreover, to the image of American lower class women.

She's as fat as an American, and American *proli* in Disneyland, only they can be this fat, like a house, like a hippopotamus [...] Even her hair is fat, heavy, cascading, maddening, impossible to curb, to restrain" (*She Loves Me* 84–85) [*Olyan hájas, mint egy amerikai, egy amerikai proli Disneylandben, azok bírnak ilyen hájasak lenni, szekrények, vízilovak. [...] A haja is kövér, nehéz, zuhogó, őrjöngő, lehetetlen befogni, gátat szabni neki*; *Egy nő* 79].

Throughout *She Loves Me*, the female body is excessively foregrounded, while the male body is mentioned only a couple of times. Moreover, the ugly, the repulsive, and the horrendous are equated exclusively with the female body, while positive terms are assigned to the male body only. In this respect, the narrator seems to endorse fully the dominant cultural paradigm regarding the gendered body as described by Peter Lehman (3–4), who claims that the "near-total attention to the woman's body" characterizing film, literature, art, and photography, together with "the silence surrounding the sexual representation of the male body" is "totally in the service of traditional patriarchy." Indeed, the narrator indulges in what Kate Millet (1971) referred to as "the mystery of the phallus," as when he regards himself with adulation, taking pleasure in his "prick power" and seeing himself as approximating corporeal perfection ("uncover my genitals, what I mean is, my prick, hey-ho, tally-ho! here I am!"; *She Loves Me* 40 [*fölfedem a szeméremtestem, abból is a faszomat, itt vagyok! hahó!*; *Egy nő* 39]), and sees himself ("a personable, slender youth" [*She Loves Me* 91], *Elegáns, karcsú fiatalember* [*Egy nő* 87]). For the narrator, woman is just cunt, and sex is like tackling a slot machine, where the coin of the perfect male body will trigger female pleasure: "my body being the coin thrown into her to make her click" (*She Loves Me* 20) [*félkarú óriás vagyok az ágyban*; *Egy nő* 22]. In this compulsive repetition of the sex narrative, we encounter what Millett

(312, 313) describes as "the cheap dream of endlessly fucking impersonal matter, mindless tissue endlessly compliant," accompanied by "the thrills of egotism." The masculine hostility permeating the sketches makes the text overly misogynist. In this regard, *She Loves Me* presents pornographic sex in a more extreme, more pronounced manner than *A Little Hungarian Pornography* did; while in the book discussed earlier, pornography was put in the service of telling the story of politics, in the latter's first thematic reading, pornography refers simply to itself. As I discuss in the second thematic reading and the rhetorical reading below, sex receives its double meaning when it is shown to be a power game with reversible roles as well as when it is presented as a cover story for something that is untellable in the postmodern mode.

My second thematic reading takes its departure from the assumption that excess provides the grounds for parody in literature. In *She Loves Me,* excess-based parody is clearly indicated by the inordinate repetition of female corporeal ugliness, captured incomparably excessive misogynist language. Parody is also suggested by the light-hearted, playful, mocking, scoffing Esterházy tone, which ridicules the patriarchal ideology embedded in the sexist discourse (on parody subverting ideology, see Slethaug 604). By the reversal of perspective, parody inspects that man, reversing thereby the subject–object relations. Esterházy's playful *double entendre* reverses the gaze in the Lacanian manner, and the woman who was formerly the object of the gaze now becomes its subject (on the Lacanian reversal of the gaze, see Dragon 26); it is her turn now to gaze at the man who, while dreading the female body, is willessly drawn to it. The patriarchal man who believes he dominates woman, is overpowered by her, unable to resist female power. This reversal goes hand in hand with the reversal of topic–comment relations, positing man as the topic of the narrative, with accounts of women functioning as comment. Following this reversal, the litany of sex with ninety-plus partners now shows women in the grammatical subject positions. Indeed, each section begins with woman as the grammatical subject: "There's this woman. She loves me" [*Van egy nő. Szeret*] or "There's this woman. She hates me" [*Van egy nő. Gyűlöl*]. Also, in terms of action, women are placed in the agent position for having the sole opportunity to satisfy the uncontrollable desire of men now in the patient position.

Although, as my first thematic reading suggests, the book seems to put women— as well as female corporeality, ugliness, vulgarity—as objects in the center of narrative attention, the *double entendre* achieved by the reversal of topic–comment relations transfers thematic centrality as the object of narrative attention to the

male narrator. Indeed, it is he who functions as the dramatic blindspot, in the sense Réka Cristian ("Ambiguous Male" 88) introduces this term, as "the link that establishes the reason and meaning for all the other events" or as "a character [...] that represents the visible part of the unsaid, the repressed, the *unheimlich*, the unfamiliar, strange figure who is the most important key to the understanding of the plot" ("From Delicate Absence to Presence"). For in spite of what the Hungarian title (*Egy nő* [literal translation: 'one woman']) suggests—that the book is *about* women—it is the desire of man that holds together all the narratives. When reversed by what I called structural *double entendre*, man becomes the object of the gaze, much like Vera Benczik describes the reversal of the gaze in the James Bond movie *Casino Royale*, where the physically hurt Bond reveals, as object of the gaze, his broken body, thereby signaling a most un-Bond-like vulnerability. By the same token, by reversing the gaze, as well as textual topic and comment relations, Esterházy foregrounds the helplessness of the broken man, whose sexual drive will stop at nothing, whose physical desire cannot be controlled. Male disempowerment becomes as important a theme in the novel as is female corporeality, for the desiring man is at the mercy of woman, no matter what.

The *double entendre* reversal of one thematic reading into the other indicates that while the many faces of female corporeality are ridiculed by the male chauvinist narrator, the self-image of male virility is also parodied. Moreover, while both the object and the subject of sexist egotism are displayed on this parodic stage, the patriarchal man's perception of female corporeality and man's powerlessness at the female body are both asserted and questioned. Yet even if we are willing to accept that *double entendre* turns sexist discourse into a parody of male sexual conduct, it is very difficult to fully exempt Esterházy of charges of patriarchal sexual politics, since by employing *double entendre*, the figure of "bothness," utter uncertainty prevails as to what the reader should laugh at. Indeed, this parodic *double entendre* is first and foremost undecidable because, to apply Linda Hutcheon's (97, 101, 106) acute observation, parody is always "doubly coded... "it both legitimizes and subverts that which it parodies," "inscribing as well as undermining it" in a complicitous way. To be sure, by creating a narrator who is both repulsed by the female body and hopelessly drawn to it, and by employing the *double entendre* figure to destabilize authorial intention, Esterházy seems also to legitimize as well as subvert pornographic discourse. As the author performs the gesture of *double entendre*, the narrator assumes total unreliability as to whether (or when) female corporeality and male vulnerability are embraced or ridiculed.

Ultimately, *She Loves Me*'s postmodernity is most prevalent in its approximating what, in his seminal study on postmodern fiction, Zoltán Abádi Nagy takes as representative narrative techniques of the postmodern text: *bonyolult játékosság* (26) ['complex playfulness'], *a képtelenségekben való tobzódás* (26) ['excessive abundance of impossibilities'], and permutational fiction with *alternatív narratív vonalak ugyanabban a szövegben* (29) ['holding alternative narrative lines in the same text']. Indeed, Esterházy seems to allow his narrator to travel through alternative narrative lines by recounting all possibilities of sexual intercourse, playfully evoking all contrary and even contradictory plot lines—to the degree that their holding together within one narrative becomes utterly impossible. Through the ninety-plus versions of the sex story, not only do we learn about the different ways of looking at sex, the open possibilities of the sexual adventure, but also about the ways man relates to sexuality.

Viewed from the rhetorical perspective, pornography in *She Loves Me* informs both language and narrative. As language, pornography locks all players into its patriarchal-sexist grid, obstructing meaning and meaningful communication. Language is not a transparent glass allowing the speaker to see or speak through, nor does it point to anything outside itself. Locked into language and determined by language relations, agency and patiency are assigned to those who occupy corresponding grammatical (subject or object) positions. In other words, what characters do in this piece of fiction is solely determined by the rhetoric of the narrative. That is, when women are presented as the objects of the discursive gaze (with their full corporeality presented), they become patients; when women are put in the grammatical subject position ("She loves/hates me"), women are assigned agency, while men become patients at the mercy of women. Pornography is not a theme with an actual outside reference, nor is it a metaphor for something larger, but frames instead a reductionist language game, prohibiting words to produce meaning. Out of a tautological identification of topic and comment, all that can be affirmed is that pornography is the language of pornography. Put simply, pornography is pornography.

As narrative, the pornographic excludes all other narratives. Stories of gendered corporeality are repeated excessively, with an endless parodic retelling that excludes all possibility of telling any other story. Only the impossibility of telling can be told, and only the narrative failure can be repeated again and again. Plot and fixed set of characters are substituted by the obsessive repetition and further permutation of the only possible story, the sex story. To apply Pál Hegyi's (*Lovecraft Laughing* 52)

succinct claim formulated in connection with the weird in detective fiction, this narrative also "generates self-referential texts about the impossibility of reading"—and, one must add, of telling. Esterházy's text also reveals a certain uncanniness in the sense that the ninety-seven sections together offer a "tale never-to-be-told," thereby "creating an atmosphere of utter uncertainty." Therefore, what Hegyi claims elsewhere can be adopted again, as "narratability is thematized, while the telling of the story itself becomes the story" (*a történet elmondódását tematizálja, s a történet elmondása maga is történetté válik*) ("Az olvasás rettenete" 83). Since telling *the* story is impossible, the writer can only tell about untellability, whose compulsive repetition gets thematized, the obsessive retelling of one storytelling the story of untellability. In the grand scheme of the narrative, another *double entendre* is at work, or more precisely, is shown to not work: only the sex story is told repeatedly, while its other "understanding" remains untellable. This is probably the story of love, passion, loyalty, and intimacy.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In the two books discussed above, Esterházy foregrounds pornography, sex, and carnality with wry humor. The *double entendre* in *A Little Hungarian Pornography* allows sexual conditions to evoke political conditions, and political conditions to evoke sexual conditions, both informed by such explicitly pornographic features as exploitation, abuse, humiliation, and moral corruption. In *She Loves Me,* pornography serves as the thematics carrying both woman's and man's participation in sex as a game of power. Rhetorically, all stories are reduced to the one possible story, that of pornography, told in permutational alternatives.

The thematics shared by all the supposedly pornographic states consists in the difficulty of meaningful human relations. The body may often be vulgar, filthy, and repulsive, yet it is still, as Elizabeth Grosz (86) puts it, the only "phenomenon experienced by me and thus provides the very horizon & perspectival point which places me in the world and makes relations between me, other objects, and other subjects possible." To give a possible interpretation to the example I left unreflected at the beginning of my article, even pancreatic cancer can be tamed when the person relates to it as subject, giving it feminine diminutives as *Hasnyálka, Édes kisasszony*, or *Mirigyke* ['Little Pancrie,' 'Sweet Lady,' 'Glandulie'; *Hasnyálmirigy-napló* 24, 30, 87], thereby embracing not only the illness but, through it, death.

The two books discussed here suggest that rarely do intersubjective relations come about, but when they do, they come about via the body. Means of intersubjectivity, a Maurice Merleau-Pontyan Esterházy seems to claim, include the valorization of the body, the construction of a corporeal interworld, and the recognition of the other as subject (see *Phenomenology*). Here lies the ultimate irony of sex and bodily existence: no matter how vulgar, pitiful, and ugly the body might be at times, only by accepting the primacy of the body is humankind capable of overshadowing, and only momentarily, its relentless solipsism. Or, as the untellable story might go, only love is the antidote to death.

IN IMPLODED SENTENCES
On Charles Bernstein's Poetic Attentions

I would like to make the following general claims about the poetry of Charles Bernstein, the 2015 Janus Pannonius Grand Prize for Poetry Laureate. Bernstein's is a poetry of attention, a poetry attentive to language, a language poetry. His is innovative-experimental poetry, which at the same time takes on some radical poetic and philosophical traditions. Moreover, Bernstein likes to cross boundaries, inviting his readers, especially in his philosophical poems, to participate in the creative process he calls *"wreading."* Using quotations, near-quotations, textual residues, resonances, and ekphrases, he zigzags between his own texts and those of others; such plurality of linguistic registers brings about a characteristic polyphony and heteroglossia, especially in his playful and humorous poems. A poet attentive to the processes of consciousness, he captures special states of mind with precision, especially in his recent lyrical-elegiac pieces.

Poetry of attention, poetry attentive to language, language poetry

Bernstein's conception of language, the language of poetry in particular, can be traced back to at least Emily Dickinson in American poetry. In this conception, language knows more than its speaker, and if the speaker wants to know that "more," he or she will have to interrogate language itself. For language, as Bernstein contends, has its own memory, which allows the speaker to explore its possibilities (*Attack* 102).

So language is not the medium of poetry but its focus, object, and even content. Or, as Robert Creeley puts it in his Preface to the Hungarian translation of Charles Olson's poetry, it is the "way of thinking the world" (10). Language never shows the world without itself being shown in the process. That is why when the poet speaks about the world, he always speaks about language as well.

What we have here, then, is the renewal of the particular American tradition of the poetics of attention, where the object of attention is language. Bernstein has been writing, for the past forty plus years, in the intellectual field of force marked by philosophers and poets with radical thoughts about language, as well as their

inheritors, the language poets. During this time, he published over forty volumes of poems and essays.

Bernstein started writing in the 1970s, as a member—and soon leading figure—of the group called the language poets, the most prominent of the postmodern-experimental movements at the time. They took their name from the journal *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E* (1980–84), the primary medium where they articulated their radical views. Over the years, the language poets published over two hundred volumes of poems and essays, which then occasioned hundreds of critical studies.

In direct lineage with the aesthetics of the radical avant-garde movements of the 20th century—of Gertrude Stein, Jack Spicer, the Black Mountain poets, and the Objectivists—the poetic theory propounded by the language poets, and most prominently by Bernstein, holds that language is not a transparent (and unperceivable) medium of self-expression and communication. For one, because there is no prior self or poetic theme or topic to be expressed. Nor is there anyone at the other end of the line: the receiver is "off the hook" ("The Lives of the Toll Takers"; *All the Whiskey* 150).

Language is the source of all experience, while "experience is a dimension built into language" (*Content's Dream* 35). One cannot engage with the world without engaging with language itself. But in order to engage with language, the poet must find ways of foregrounding the materiality of language, and thereby demonstrate its non-transparency. So that attention may fall on language itself, and not be distracted by the illusion of the possibility of seeing through it, of seeing the world lying beyond. "[T]he movement," he writes, is toward opacity/denseness—visibility of language through the making translucent of the medium" (*Content's Dream* 70).

So the job of the language poet is to make language visible and audible. To bring about a consciousness of language in readers, to help them notice language whose transparency was so naturally assumed. To foreground it as material, something to be perceived by the senses: visible, audible, tangible, with words that can be smelt and tasted even, as Whitman suggested in *An American Primer*. The poet will do this by "the sounding of language from the inside," as Marjorie Perloff puts it (*The Dance of the Intellect* 221), feeling out the lumps as in wood, places where the material thickens. It is these lumps that make it nontransparent, visible. Bernstein calls these visibility spots "typographicities" and "syntaxophonies" (*Content's Dream* 73), of which there are many, one just needs to notice them, sound them or feel them out. The poet who made a living by writing and editing medical texts applies the medical term *dysraphysm*, meaning the "dysfunctional fusion of embryonic parts,"

to such spots of visibility in general, spots of "mis-seaming" of components in the texture of language ("Dysraphysm" 39; *All the Whiskey* 119).

Everything that is unusual or irregular counts as dysraphism, making language visible, and depriving it of its medial transparency. "Interruption and inscrutability enthrall me," Bernstein writes in his preface to his Hungarian collection ("To the Reader" 9). In line with the thinking of the Russian Formalists, Bernstein understands such irregularities as defamiliarizations and estrangements: they defamiliarize what is familiar and denaturalize what is natural, making even the mother tongue strange. As if Proust's famous aphorism had been put into practice, which claims that the language of all beautiful books sounds necessarily "strange" *("les beaux livres sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère"* [305]). In consequence, whatever was invisible and unperceivable now comes to the foreground. This is why Bernstein is so eager to create puns and construct other anomalies of language; that is why he does not correct his typos (or probably even makes them consciously)—so that all the nodes, lumps, and gnarls that are normally smoothed out from the texture of language would show—and help reveal meanings that otherwise would not surface. For no matter how little sense non-sequiturs or puns or homonyms make, they still make *some* sense. As he writes in "The Lives of the Toll Takers,"

> There is no plain sense of the word,
> nothing is straightforward
>   description a lie behind a lie:
>   but truths can still be told.
> (*All the Whiskey* 172)

Bernstein's poetry is not self-expression, nor is it the communication of some content or message pre-existing the poem. He only speaks about the communicative and expressive function of poetry ironically, for example, in "Thank You for Saying Thank You." A communicative or expressive poem is not "difficult," it claims, but "totally accessible," conveying only "the intended meaning." "It / says just what / it says." Of course, it doesn't say much either. No wonder, since it is often the difficulty that will provoke and even bring the reader closer, as he puts it. And "working out the difficulties with the poem is the best thing for a long-term aesthetic experience" (*Attack* 5).

The prose writer, he claims, does not experience such problems, since there the writer will "start with the world" and will find the words to match the world. But the poet must work in the other direction: first find the words, then the world within.

> That is, in prose you start with the world
> and find the words to match; in poetry you start
> with the words and find the world in them.
> ("Dysraphysm"; *All the Whiskey* 119)

In language poetry, then, poetic "content" arises from language itself. As words appear one after the other, so do they realize ideas. In such a way that language is no more a tool of expression but its substance. This is what he writes about language as the world and knowledge based on linguistic conventions.

> The distortion is to imagine that knowledge has an "object" outside of the "language games" of which it is a part—that words refer to "transcendental signifieds," to use an expression from another tradition, rather than being part of a language which itself produces meaning in terms of its grammar, its conventions, its "agreement in judgment." Learning a language is not learning the names of things outside language, as if it were simply a matching up signifiers with signifieds, as if signifieds already existed and we were just learning new names for them (which seems to be Augustine's picture in the opening quote of *Investigations*). Rather, we are initiated by language into a socious, which is for us the world. So that the foundations of knowledge are not so much based on a preexisting empirical world as on shared conventions and mutual attunement.
> (*Content's Dream* 171–72)

Linguistic radicalism

For Bernstein, innovation is an "aesthetic necessity"; "the human need to create anew is no less strong than our need for lamentation" (*Attack* 34–35). In line with the long tradition of innovation going back to at least Poe in American poetry, who in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" demanded that originality "be elaborately sought," Bernstein claims that innovation is what constitutes tradition, while

also the only valid response to it: "Tradition is the record of innovation. Innovation is a response to tradition" (*Attack* 228).

In his innovative language poetry, Bernstein allows language itself to take control over the creative process and develops radical poetic techniques in order to foreground the materiality of language. Among these techniques, we find the creation of new words, agrammatical structures, ellipses and visible traces of ellipses, the dismemberment of words into sounds and letters, sound mutations, syntactic doubling, and what he calls "imploded sentences."

He creates new words, but these words are such that *could* exist in English (see Marjorie Perloff, *The Dance* 216–17). Bernstein is fascinated by rare words, whose meaning has to be searched for even by the native speaker in a dictionary. And likes to use words in their fifth or sixth meanings.

Bernstein violates the rules of semantics and syntax as well, creating words and syntactic structures that do not exist in "proper" English. In his nonsense poems, he obeys the rules of syntax but not of semantics, putting together words that refuse to follow the combinational rules of semantics. The nonsense structures of "Broken English" are not to be "understood," if by understanding we mean paraphrasability; although these lines are written in perfect structures syntactically, they still make no sense semantically. The words insist in their wordness; the sentences must be taken in their factuality and actuality.

> Brushing up fate pixel by pixel, burnighing
> dusk: the sum of entropy and elevation.
> (*Recalculating* 271)

"The Italian Border of the Alps" is another nonsense poem, where not only is the semantics broken but the series follows no logical order; this nonsense semantics, related (or unrelated) in non sequitur structures, account for the *unheimlich* reading experience of such poems. But whether these are nonsense poems or non sequitur poems or both, meaning is never referential: it does not point outside of the poem. For as he writes in "Palukaville," "It's not the supposed referent that has the truth. Words themselves. The particulars of the language […] require the attention of that which is neither incidentally nor accidentally related to the world" (*All the Whiskey* 31).

Elliptic condensation will often create syntactic doubling, where one syntactic unit can go either way, round off the preceeding structure or begin the subsequent one. Moreover, by typographically marking deletions, as he does in "Standing

Target," for example, he makes clear that empty spaces are not really empty but contain traces of words fallen through the tracks of language.

                fatigue
                        of   of
                              open for
                to   , sees
        doubles
        glass   must
                are   for
                in   : they
                    are   , her
                          that it
        watches, leaves,
                                    days that
                          made
        and the
        (*All the Whiskey* 64)

In other cases, ellipsis comes about by the breaking of words into their constituents, suggesting that the smallest semantic unit is not the word but the sound and the letter. This is why he applies line breaks within words; this is why his words break into syllables and letters; this is why he creates new semantic units out of the random combinations and permutations of letters, as in "Azoot d'Puund," "List Off," and "Dea%r Fr~ie%d," for example.

    He chooses his words as much for their meanings as for their sound or look on the page, violating thereby both the principles of selection and combination of sentence construction. What he does is combine elements inadequately selected from the pool of selectable words. Altering the sound structure of words, he creates new phonetic mutations. For such the various forms of phonetic foregrounding serve euphony; as he puts it in a tongue-in-cheek passage in "The Lives of Toll Takers, these are the "services" poets provide for the reader.

    Poets deserve compensation
    for such services.
    [...]

services as alliteration,
        internal rhymes,
exogamic structure, and
unusual vocabulary.
(*All the Whiskey* 172)

Moreover, all these radical departures from the norms of language contribute to what he calls imploded sentences, sentences that are fragmentary, broken, associative, acrobatic, cumulative, incomplete, and without closure, as well as rough, knotty, lumpy, and gnarled. They are very much alive too, the word *sentence* being a near homonym of the word *sentience*, he claims. The sentence does not follow the normative—subject + predicate + object (noun phrase + verb phrase + noun phrase)—structure of English grammar, for the rules of syntax would rather hinder the development of thought.

Deserted all sudden a all
Or gloves of notion, seriously
Foil sightings, polite society
Verge at just about characterized
Largely a base, cups and
And gets to business, hands
Like "hi", gnash, aluminum foil
Plummeting emphatically near earshot
Scopes bleak incontestably at point
Of incompetence [...]
(*All the Whiskey* 55)

It is not accidental that these sentences disregard the rules of English syntax, or that their irregularities explode in the middle of the text, drawing the reader's attention to them—and the non-transparency of this medium. For by placing one's thinking into a given form, a paradigm pre-existing the sentence just being born, the actuality of the meanings would suffer. Imploded sentences are not characterized by the "syntactic ideality" of proper sentence grammar but by the "surface disruption of syntactic ideality":

In imploded-sentence poetry, meaning flows durationally—*horizontally*—by means of the linear continuousness of the sweeping, syncopated rhythms. While in the complete/closed sentence, attention is deflected to an abstracted, or accompanying, "meaning" that is being "conveyed," in the imploded sentence, the reader stays plugged in to the wave-like pulse of the writing. In other words, you keep moving through the writing without having to come up for ideational air: the ideas are all inside the process. (*Artifice of Absorption*)

And as he suggests in "The Klupzy Girl," sentences written in imploded sentences deprive the readers of the complacent comfort of the familiar and will act as a cold shower in bringing them to their senses.

> Poetry is like a swoon, with this difference:
> it brings you to your senses.
> (*All the Whiskey* 84)

And as language does not obey preconceived rules, so does the poem not obey preexisting form. These pieces are not written in closed form, complete with closure, but in often agrammatical fragments, unfinished sentences, in lines running across the page. Rhymes are extremely scarce, virtually absent from Bernstein's poems, as are parallelisms of sound or thought; even metaphors occur very rarely. Bernstein is quite explicit in refusing poetic devices. In the last lines of "Endless Destination," for example he revises Gertrude Stein's famous aphorism into a new tautology, claiming that the two elements of the simile are *like* one another, while the tenor of the metaphor *is* its vehicle.

> Love is like love, a baby
> like a baby, meaning like
> memory, light like light.
> A journey's a detour
> and a pocket a charm
> in which deceit are borne.
> A cloud is a cloud and
> a story like a story,
> song is a song, fury
> like fury.
> (*All the Whiskey* 210)

Not following any abstract metrical scheme, the Bernstein poem is not regular metrically either. For free verse, as he puts it in "How Empty Is My Bread Pudding," "is not a type of poetry but an imperative to liberate verse from constraints no longer applicable for a new time and new circumstance" (*Recalculating* 82). And to write traditional metrical verse in the 21st century, he goes on, alluding to Robert Frost's witticism, "is like having sex through a net" (84).

Revising intellectual traditions

Bernstein's poetry exhibits the influence of several intellectual traditions, among them, most prominently that of poets and philosophers with radical conceptions of language, Gertrude Stein and Ludwig Wittgenstein, as well as Charles Olson and Alfred North Whitehead.

Bernstein is a good student of Stein, a fact that should come as no surprise, since he wrote his undergraduate thesis in philosophy at Harvard University on *The Making of Americans*, approaching it through Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The first lesson he learned from Stein concerns the materiality of language, or what he calls "the *stuffness* of language, its *verbality*," which becomes visible or palpable only "when language is listened to, or read, without the filter of its information function" *(Attack* 105). As such, the linguistic signs have physical extensions; being alive, they move, slip, jump, and, as he writes in "The Kiwi Bird in the Kiwi Tree," the downpouring words "fecund with tropicality" drench the poet.

> I want no paradise only to be
> drenched in the downpour of words, fecund
> with tropicality.
> (*All the Whiskey* 144)

This is why the "Pronoun slips on banana" ("Sunsickness"; *Dark City* 33), why Bernstein is so fond of puns relying on sound correspondences, and why he welcomes homophonic translations where the translator, "letting the sound lead" (*Attack* 200), translates only sound. And it is the manifestation of this "stuffness" of language when words are misspelt, when the typist allows the fingers to slide on the keyboard and resists neat typography in every way. That is, all "typographicities" and

"syntaxophonies" which reveal meaning by eliminating the informational function of language and achieve an "alienation effect" (*Content's Dream* 73).

Bernstein developed his aesthetics of language writing by using Wittgenstein's language philosophy as a foundation. In addition to the Wittgensteinian principles I cited earlier—language as the vehicle of thinking and language as nontransparent substance—Bernstein appropriated the philosopher's refusal of private language and private mental processes, as well as the idea of the speaker locked inside language.

Although Bernstein talks about poetry as "a private act in a public space" (*Content's Dream* 77), he too claims with the Viennese-Cambridge philosopher that "private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar" (*Philosophical Investigations* §272), but results from the private creative activity of one person searching for an order that "comes from one's 'private' *listening,* hearing" (*Content's Dream* 77), and an "exploration and revelation of that which is private" (78). So the act is private because it stems from one person's creativity. But the place in which it is born is public, both in virtue of the shared language and the printed page. And since language is the vehicle of thought, not only can language not be private but neither can thought. Nor is it an "instrument" of "self-expression," Bernstein claims; one's private writing is the "investigation or revelation of meanings" and the "exploration of the human common ground" (81). "For what is hidden," he argues, citing Wittgenstein, "is of no interest" (*Philosophical Investigations* §126).

Moreover, accepting Wittgenstein's well known axiom, "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (*Tractatus* 5.6), Bernstein goes even further. When the child acquires language, he acquires concepts, or Wittgensteinian "limits" within which to see the world.

> Our learning language is learning the terms by which a world gets seen. Language is the means of our socialization, our means of initiation into our (a) culture. I do not suggest that there is nothing beyond, or outside of, human language, but that there is meaning only in terms of language, that the givenness of language is the givenness of the world. (*Content's Dream* 62)

So the relation of language to the world does not consist in language "accompanying" thought, but in language being thought and thinking itself. It is language that contains the world, not vice versa. "Truthfulness, love of language: attending to its telling" ("Palukaville"; *All the Whiskey* 31). "When I think in language, there aren't

'meanings' going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language is itself the vehicle of thought," he again quotes Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations* §329; *Content's Dream* 62). So language is really the space or territory within which the world exists. And meanings enter the world exclusively through language.

"My aim in poetry is to show the fly it's in a bottle," Bernstein writes in his preface to the Hungarian collection of his poetry ("To the Reader" 9), echoing Wittgenstein's famous remark, "What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (*Philosophical Investigations* §309). As opposed to philosophers, poets know there's no way out of the bottle.

Several elements of Charles Olson's poetics can be identified in Bernstein's writings. Like Olson, Bernstein too proclaims the particularity of the poetic text, the aim of the poem being the presentation of the individual, concrete, and physical, as well as the breaking through limits. For as Robert Creeley cites Olson, "limits are what any of us are inside of" ("Preface" 12). "Read globally, write locally," Bernstein revises the well-known dictum (*Attack* 77). According to Olson's axiom, the poet's experience must be transmitted, or projected, in its instancy onto the page, before the mind rearranges it into a meaningful (rational, sensible, proper) structure, thereby halting the thinking process and transforming process into transparently meaningful structures. This is "local writing." For the poet writing locally it is important to be aware of the configuration he is writing from, and then "sound through" these limits, "out into the open world" (12). Olson taught a whole generation to be aware of the locality—the "limits"—, but then go on thinking globally: to "alter the habits that otherwise framed the familiar issues," Creeley continues in his Preface to the Hungarian edition of Olson's poems.

> [...] particularly to push back of such givens or, rather, so take them in mind and cast them that all realigned and found again the source of its own occasion. (12)

This is exactly what Bernstein does, what Creeley emphasizes in Olson's thinking ("to let out thought, to throw it" [13]): he "lets out" thought, throws it, and lets "the mind go forth to the reaches of its own ability to recognize and respond" (13).

Bernstein, a mind going forth indeed, practices what Olson termed "kinetic writing," whereby he preserves the spontaneity and individuality as well as speed of the thinking process. Because the poet cannot allow his poems to slow down,

the swiftly racing text will sometimes include agrammatical sentences, "improper" linguistic structures. But this agrammaticalness—for his thoughts appear instantly on the page, before the rational mind would revise them conceptually—is the price he pays for making his poetry the imprint of attention and the most intensive form of participating in the world. This poetry resembles improvisation and stream of consciousness, but is unlike either; we seem rather to overhear the thoughts of a person thinking aloud or talking to himself, thoughts in their rawness, roughness, and crudity. Much like Olson demands famously in his "Projective Verse" essay.

> ONE PERCEPTION MUST IMMEDIATELY AND DIRECTLY LEAD TO A FURTHER PERCEPTION. It means exactly what it says, is a matter of, at *all* points, […] get on with it, keep moving, keep in, speed, the nerves, their speed, the perceptions, theirs, the acts, the split second acts, the whole business, keep it moving as fast as you can, citizen. (17)

This poetry is the most intensive form of not only attention but also feedback, since it makes the knowing of the world possible without separating the observer either from the process of observation or the processes of language transporting his thoughts. In fact, such poetry allows the poet and the reader to participate in the same processes.

Bernstein follows the Olsonian tradition in practicing field composition as well. Lineation following the movement of thought and lines visually interpreting the thinking process brings about the force field of the poem, one that is contiguous with the creative as much as with the reading process. In such writing, the energies of the poem will be preserved, for, as Olson claims, "A poem is energy transferred from where the poet got it (he will have some several causations), by way of the poem itself to, all the way over to, the reader […] the poem itself must, at all points, be a high energy construct and, at all points, an energy-discharge" (16). Indeed, the poem does not duplicate the world, is not its representation, nor is it self-expression; rather, it is a form of the world, its field, space, vehicle—much like language is. In field composition, the poet allows "content" to take care of form. For, as the second axiom of "Projective Verse" claims, "FORM IS NEVER MORE THAN AN EXTENSION OF CONTENT" (16). Form will show itself in the process of the poem. And the poet, obedient to experience and form, will transfer the energy that demanded a poem without loss.

We know that perception is never independent from the cultural and social paradigms; in fact, it is these paradigms that determine what we see. Perception itself is cognition dependent. We only see what we already know and understand (*"Man erblickt nur, was man schon weiß und versteht"*), Goethe told his friend Friedrich von Müller. In other words, it is language and its cognitive structures that determine our vision. This is Alfred North Whitehead's starting point: what we see comes from our minds rather than from the things themselves.

> These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe appropriate bodies in external nature. Thus the bodies are perceived as with qualities which in reality do not belong to them, qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which should in truth be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent; the nightingale for his song; and the sun for his radiance. (*Science* 55)

The poet seems trapped into writing about what he sees: what he actually already knows and understands. There is, however, a way out of this trap: if the poet does not write about what he knows but about what he does not know. This is the claim Bernstein formulates in his preface to the Hungarian reader,

> I don't know what I am saying until I say it, and I don't know how to say it until I do. A poem for me is finding a way after losing my way, where myopia is a manifestation of grace. ("To the Reader" 9)

For, as Whiteahead claims, knowledge cannot be produced by forcing the phenomena of the material world into inherited conceptual categories, but only if we try to perceive the world by mere attention, which presents the things around us outside of conceptual categories, or before they fall into these conceptual paradigms.

Whitehead calls this "uncognitive apprehension" *prehension* (*Science* 67), the "perceptive mode" characterized by "presentational immediacy"; "in this 'mode' the contemporary world is consciously prehended as a continuum of extensive relations" (*Process* 61). For Whitehead, the "perceptive constitution" of prehension is a "creative action," in which "the universe [is] always becoming one in a particular unity of self-experience" (56–57). As a "contemporary nexus of actual entities" (63), it is a form of direct engagement with the world, allowing the person to participate in the processes of the world at the uncognitive stage.

Bernstein refuses the poetry that connects to the final stages of the continuum between the "perceptive mode" and "conscious intellectuality," or "intellectual self-analysis" (57), corresponding to the process whereby one notices objects, comprehends them, and places them in the cultural system of comprehension and interpretation. But poets who consider themselves the inheritors of radical modernism and early postmodernism insist that their task is to go *before* this conscious intellectuality and totalizing interpretation, and register the processes of perceiving and experiencing without the restructuring of cognitive intellectualization. Bernstein's often agrammatical sentences, non-linear and non-narrative poetry is the experiment to make visible such Whiteheadian prehensive and uncognitive dimensions, where objects perceived do not depend on familiar cognitive and conceptual paradigms.

Boundary crossings

Bernstein's poetry abounds in boundary crossings of all kinds: between genres, discourses, registers, and styles alike. In the works of the poet who likes to incorporate "foreign" material—literary "ready mades" and "*déjà dit*" texts, as Perloff calls them ("Pleasures")—in the texture of his poetry, differences between poetry and prose disappear, as do differences between poetic and ordinary language.

Bernstein insists on crossing the boundary between writer and reader as well. Establishing a new relationship with his readers, he invites you to participate in the creative process (see, for example, "The Lives of the Toll Takers"; *All the Whiskey* 150–79). The poet counts on the active cooperation and creative involvement of the reader in the process which he calls *creative wreading* (*Attack* 43 ff.). He demands, that is, that the reader carry on writing, whereby the process from reading to writing will remain unbroken. Unfinished sentences, words broken into constituent parts, linguistic fragments, ellipses, and erasures, as well as grammatical violations together constitute the ideal terrain for the cooperation of writer and reader. In each case, the reader is offered the chance to finish or complete linguistic units, reinstate erased parts, or determine ambiguities—to give particular directions to structures that are indeterminate, ambiguous, or multiple, deriving from the dysraphic structures as well as the built-in polisemanticism of language. But even the different interpretations of the allusions and foreign texts Bernstein uses requires, as well as entails, creative co-writing, since each reader will notice different allusions, and notice each differently.

The distinction between philosophy and poetry is also blurred in some of his writings. For example, *Artifice of Absorption* is a transgressive text in terms of its genre, and could be called an essay broken into verse lines and a philosophical poem equally. 19th century detective stories will absorb the reader very differently from 20th century "antiabsorbtive" texts, Gertrude Stein or language writing, he claims. The latter will be confrontational rather than absorptive, always confronting the reader with its "impermeable material." Such "antiabsorptive or impermeable textuality," he goes on, "can make a poem hard to absorb, not only by calling attention to the sound qualities of its lexicon but also by preventing any immediate processing of the individual word's meaning."

Several poems address theoretical issues (for example, reference, the unity of the lyric self, the materiality of language, the tactile qualities of words), and cite or allude to a variety of theorists (Freud, Wittgenstein, Cavell, Lacan, Lakoff, Beauvoir). Theory and poetic practice become one in Bernstein's writings. He famously claims—signifying upon Aristotle and Creeley alike—that "Theory is never more than the extension of practice" (*Content's Dream* 397). Several of his poems, "Palukaville" among them, seem to have been inspired by critical prose, while at the same time breathing new life into the discourse of literary theory.

Discursive polyphony

The appropriation of earlier texts constitutes a distinctive form of transgression in Bernstein's poetry, as he zigzags between his own lines and those of others. As he writes in the preface to the Hungarian volume,

> My register goes from rapture to rupture, often in the same breath; from despair to hysteria to preternatural calm, from anxiety to dissociation, from agitation to evanescence. ("To the Reader" 9)

Discourses in the individual poems are overwhelmingly plural, ranging from the serious to the playful, from the tragic to the sarcastic. The distinctiveness of the applied registers usually comes from the foreign texts that get incorporated by quotation, citation, allusion, or evocation. In these "recyclings," as Creeley called Bernstein's appropriations ("On Bernstein"), readers may identify not just quotations but textual residues, resonances, and ekphrases, in which the boundaries between

the poet's own text (the one being written right there) and the texts appropriated from others (those that have already been written) become blurred.

This self-reflexivity and intertextuality are perhaps his most general methods; indeed, we can hardly find a single poem where no other text, fragment, or *bon mot*, whether from literary texts, business leaflets, advertizing materials, is being referred to, cited, or echoed. Bernstein is an extremely learned poet, who has in his head, simultaneously, everything he read before, and is at any moment capable of citing the appropriate lines from Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Wallace Stevens, Charles Olson, or mobilize a movie title, a proverb, a saying, or a *bon mot*. Such polyphony of discourses will bring about a new kind of dysraphism where foreign texts create nodes, lumps, and gnarls in the texture of the poem. This dysraphic intertextuality will serve as an additional method for making poetic language dense, opaque, and ultimately visible (as well as tangible).

By admitting foreign materials into the language of the poem, and containing simultaneously the language objects he "found" in the world outside, as a screen through which to read, he postmodernizes the modernist *objet trouvé*. Dysraphic intertextuality will multiply the pleasures of the texts too, Perloff's "pleasures of the *déjà dit*," of which both writer and reader partake. As if the poet was transplanting a limb amputated from another body, Perloff amplifies, "a transplant whose status as 'amputated limb' reminds the reader that, in Blanchot's words, resaying is always 'saying for the first time'" ("Pleasures" 277). The poet will enter a larger yet more congested public space, allowing him to speak ekphrastically, though what has already been said.

We can find examples for all kinds of allusions in Bernstein's poetry. The volume *All the Whiskey in Heaven*, for example, abounds in references to the Black Mountain poets (Olson, Duncan, Creeley), Thomas Cole, Simone de Beauvoir, Janis Joplin, Ezra Pound, the Apostle Paul, Villon, Shakespeare, Socrates, Marx, Machiavelli, Bing Crosby, and Robert Frost. Among such ekphrastic writing, when other texts are evoked through which the poems proceed, we have, in the volume *Recalculating,* texts written in the style of Thomas Campion, Leevi Lehto, Sylvia Plath, Douglas Messerli, Wallace Stevens, Whitman and Wordsworth, mixed with translations, or transplantations, of Fernando Pessoa, Osip Mandelstam, Régis Bonvicino, Velimir Khlebnikov, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and Apollinaire.

Such multiple and multivocal intertextuality seems only to underline the programmatic anti-referentiality of postmodern poetry, since references do not point to the world outside but to other texts. In other words, texts are referential to other

texts, and as such, poems remain within the boundaries of language. Perloff calls this writing incorporating literary context "*literary* lyric," for not only is the content of such poems literary but the context too (*Unoriginal Genius* 86).

Moreover, this discursive polyphony will serve as the source of Bernstein's distinctive humor. Perhaps his humor is most strident when clichés and other bits from popular culture merge with the poetic and the serious. Any reader would complete the phrase *blue suede* with *shoes*; but in "The Kluptzy Girl," Elvis is forgotten, and *blue suede* will refer to *pestilence* (*All the Whiskey* 88). In "Dysraphism," the sentence "Reality is always greener" evokes the neighbor's garden (*All the Whiskey* 118); while we hear the nursery rhyme "There was an old lady who lived in a shoe" beneath the lines "There was an old lady who lived in a / zoo" and its further distortion, "There was an old lady / who lives in a stew…" ("The Lives of the Toll Takers"; *All the Whiskey* 153–54, 158).

Given the fact that the nodes and lumps in language come about from the meeting of texts, polyphonic intertextuality is a well-functioning form of dysraphysm, which is why Bernstein is so fond of ironically-humorously overwriting aphorisms, axioms, sayings, proverbs, and slogans. For example, Bernstein alters the words of Jesus, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matthew 19.24) into

> Harder for a rich man to read a poem than
> for a hippopotamus to sing bel canto.
> ("Reveal Codes"; *All the Whiskey* 193)

And changing the familiar teaching of the Apostle Paul on all being one body in Christ (1 Corinthians 12.12) into "We may be all one body but we're sure as hell not one mind" ("The Lives of the Toll Takers"; *All the Whiskey* 177). Or gives the peculiar contextualization of the postmodernist doctrine as *"The Jew is a textual construction"* ("Racalculating"; *Recalculating* 177).

The linguistic-cultural humor so pervasively present in Bernstein's poetry is most obvious in his aphorism poems. "War Stories," for example, is written almost completely in such distorted-overwritten aphorisms—even if the intertextuality is not the source of humor but of tragedy (*All the Whiskey* 283–90). We seem to laugh when reading "Foreign Body Sensation" because every sentence is a cliché, foreign linguistic body incorporated into the poem, borrowed from talk shows, blogs, where media heroes publicly admit some very private secret and give a latter-day

conversion narrative of how their lives have changed (*All the Whiskey* 139–40). The multiple aphorisms of the prose poem "How Empty Is My Bread Pudding" evoke a whole culture, confronting the reader with the lies behind the clichés generally taken for granted (*Recalculating* 81–91). Here "Poetry is too important to be left to its own devices" applies Clémenceau's famous sentence ("War is too important to be left to the generals") to poetry (82); behind "Sometimes a cigar is just a symbol" (84) there resonates not only Freud's well-known maxim ("Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar") but also see Magritte's pipe or non-pipe (*"Ceci n'est pas une pipe"*); the line "Two prosodies diverged in a striated field" (86) evokes Frost's "The Road Not Taken"; with "Make love not unilateralism" (90) we associate the sixties slogan, "Make love not war"; hearing "No man is a peninsula entire unto itself" (91) we immediately hear John Donne's familiar line, "No man is an island, entire of itself"; while "THE PEN IS TINIER THAN THE SWORD" (91) clearly cites to the proverb, "The pen is mightier than the sword" (*Recalculating* 81–91). Such citations, near-citations, allusions, and textual residues seem to amplify the undecidability of the text, adding new quotation marks to the already questioned—because overwritten and appropriated—lines, sentences, clichés, and axioms.

Poetry attentive to consciousness, poetry of grief

New voices appeared in Bernstein's poetry in the past decade or two, the voices of the lyricist who is attentive to internal processes and registers intensive moments with precision, objectivity, as if from a distance. Without allowing the traditional "lyric self" take over, he concentrates on the state of mind itself, not the person or "patient" living through them, which is another Dickinsonian legacy in his poetry: for much like the 19th century anatomist of pain and archeologist of the deepest layers of consciousness, Bernstein also distances his suffering self from joy and pain, tracing their sources, objects, and processes instead, focusing on the sequences of cognition and the intensity of the experience. *"[H]ope is a thing / feathered with loss,"* he writes in "Poems for Rehab" (*Recalculating* 139), evoking Dickinson's well-known definition poem. And much like the Amherst predecessor, he too is fascinated by how processes lead to states of mind, and, vice versa, what internal processes these states of mind bring about.

"The Measure" is one of the earlier lyric pieces that evoke Dickinson, where the self is walking through the levels of consciousness of a "great pain," mapping up its

borders, and exploring its afterness. This self is determined all through to "stay at attention" and be "on guard," lest the unconscious pull him down into a blurred world of regret.

> The privacy of a great pain enthrones
> itself on my borders and commands me
> to stay at attention. Be on guard
> lest the hopeless magic of unconscious
> dilemmas grab hold of you in the
> foggiest avenue of regret.
> (*All the Whiskey* 90)

So the most acute danger of a "great pain" does not lie in the suffering it causes but in the possible consequence of losing one's attention, the "guard": the threat posed by the unconscious grabbing the self into its foggy avenues.

A particular state of mind is the topic of "Castor Oil," which describes the speaker's sense of losing the loved one with distancing accuracy. Step by step, the initial soul searching grows into the searching of the loved one, while the poet, not finding his soul in the song of the bird, tuneless and wandering, becomes slowly aware of his cognitive and artistic limitations. The greater powers of the world, the waters of the sea and the folds of the universe, take over, pulling him under the waves and losing him in the Leibnitzian folds and pleats of matter. The images of earlier human encounters recede, appearing as "remote displays" only, borrowed but not owned, drift away in the fading light as even the "bottom bottoms," and the loss is total.

> Tuneless, I wander, sundered
> In lent blends of remote display
> Until the bottom bottoms
> In song-drenched light, cradled fold
> (*All the Whiskey* 277)

This poem is devoid not just of self-pity (that is not unusual in Bernstein's poetry), but of any reference to the speaker's possible agency. Nor is there any reference, for that matter, for his being a patient, let alone victim. The poem uses the first person but only to give form to the account of the events and processes—as if from the perspective of a by-stander. For it is these events and processes that are important,

not how the experiencing self feels. While verbs are scarce and active verbs are even scarcer in this linguistically muted text, terseness weighs down the sentences, and structural ambiguities control the pace. All these linguistic devices create a sense of self-restraint, even humility. For the aim is to understand what is happening to the speaker, independent of how the person might suffer.

In addition to insisting on recording internal events objectively, Bernstein is keen on registering the linguistic processes attached to the psychological ones. For one, the context of all experiences is language. In "After Campion," for example, a poem which chronicles the happy moments of a one-time family car trip, every family member appears audibly: Susan speaks, Emma and Felix sing (she complains as well, twice). That is, the events are all auditive, and this family music (harmony even)—coupled with the bells ringing outside—together impart and stabilize a feeling that is pleasure.

> Music strays, will's composed
> Pleasure strikes when feeling stays
> (*All the Whiskey* 238)

The abstract concepts of pleasure and feeling are described in concrete auditory terms. Already the form is musical, evoking the classic ballad form with the beats of strong-stress meter and the rhymes so rare in his poetry. It is the musical form of the ballad that conveys the auditive memories made up of the family interactions embedded into the auditive discourses of talk and song. These multiple auditive experiences will then give out the linguistic content which serves to distinguish between the abstract concepts of feeling and pleasure.

The elegies written over the past several years stand out among the lyrical pieces in bearing the marks, both thematic and technical, of Emily Dickinson, the greatest American lyricist of death. Her poetry of grief may be considered a version of her poetry of attention, with the poet attentive to internal processes accompanying loss and grief, and the recognition that it is impossible to come to terms with the death of the loved one.

We find many such poems of loss and grief in Bernstein's last volume of poetry, *Recalculating* (2013), each tracing the changes in the state of mind of the grieving person. The poet is struggling with his memories, while watching, as if from a distance, the duel fought between remembering and forgetting. "Cajole me into oblivion if not / obliviousness," he orders, "Send me away, I've never been there" ("If You

Say Something, See Something" 156). Recalculating does not seem to be an option: the past cannot and should not be obliterated by a new GPS instruction. He suffers from every new impetus coming from the physical world in "Today Is the Last Day of Your Life 'Til Now" (158), and every day seems to add to his solitude and spiritual blindness, his time to be served ("Time Served" 159). The mourner speaks in broken sentences, in Bernstein's imploded sentences, since the complete grammatical sentence cannot give form to the harsh shreds of emotions. This is why, for example, "Charon's Boat" (155) abounds in non-sequiturs, linguistic self-relexions, unfinished sentences; this is why he follows the call of sound as opposed to semantics in "Synchronicity All Over Again" (160).

The finality of death is the theme of "Today Is the Last Day of Your Life 'Til Now'" (158), whose title turns around the cliché, "today is the first day of the rest of your life," proceeding to quote the title of Sydney Pollack's film, and evoke lines from T. S. Eliot, W. H. Auden, and Robert Duncan. As if we were hearing a contrapuntal canon: Bernstein ties into the parts sung by predecessors and contemporaries. This multivocal performance seems to serve a double function: on the one hand, by subduing the lyrical-elegiac voice, it deprives the suffering "lyrical ego" of the individuality and specificity of grief, while on the other, by adding his own experience to the many similar experiences, he enriches the literature of grief, amplifying the harmonized voices of the choir.

The poem "Recalculating" brings together two discourses while engaging in grief work: the discourse of Bernstein's aphorism poetry and bits from Dickinson's poems of loss and grief. Introspection, or the inspection of consciousness, is carried out with sober rationalism. It is the rational conclusion drawn by the mind of cool reason that will come to understand the preservation of the past complete with memories.

> [...]
> I think of Emma climbing the icy rocks of our imagined world and taking a fatal misstep, one that in the past she could have easily managed, then tumbling, tumbling; in my mind she is yet still in free fall, but I know all too well she hit the ground hard.
>
> The hardest thing is not to look back, the endless *if only*s, the uninvited *what could have beens*. I live not with foreknowledge but consequences; wishing I had foreknowledge, suffering the consequences of not.

[...] how poems becomes sites for mourning—not in fixed ritual repetitions (prescribed liturgy) but as mobile and specific areas for reflection and projection, holding areas, havens. Not words received for comfort. but works actively discovered in the course of searching.

[...] So much of what we can't imagine we are forced to experience. And even then we can't imagine it.
(172–75; emphasis in original)

It seems that the contents of knowledge and those of the imagination are different, and the mourner's job is to bring them in harmony, to come to the imaginative realization of what is known. All the while, locked into the dark Dickinsonian chambers of pain, he battles the infinite internal darkness.

Each day I know less than the day before. People say that you learn something from such experiences; but I don't want that knowledge and for me there are no fruits to these experiences, only ashes. I can't and don't want to "heal"; perhaps, though, go on in the full force of my disabilities, coexisting with a brokenness that cannot be accommodated, *in the dark.*
(174; emphasis in original)

As in Dickinson, so in Bernstein too we have the person trying to "grope a little" (F428) as he is feeling his way in the larger darkness inside. As in Dickinson, so in Bernstein too we have this groper learning to see, either because the "Darkness alters" or "something in the sight" does.

I've grown so accustomed to the dark that I can hardly imagine anything more than shadows...
[...]
It's always darkest at night. A darkness day can't touch.
(*Recalculating* 177–78)

The Dickinson lines are clearly present here: the reader will remember "We grow accustomed to the Dark – / When Light is put away –" (F428) and "The first section of Darkness is the densest, Dear – After that Light trembles in" (L874) with the

suggestion that in order to accept death one must first accept darkness, and in order to know death one must know darkness as well.

But knowing can only stem from not knowing, or the acceptance of not knowing. Much like his 19th century predecessor, Bernstein also insists that the only way to dispel metaphysical darkness is by coveting a familiarity with darkness: the griever must learn to feel comfortable in darkness, and ultimately accept the impossibility of clear sight. The groper will step on the noncognitive path that takes not knowing for granted, a not knowing that can only be captured in a particular language suited for prehension: language of linguistic darkness, dense with dysraphysms, and imploded sentences, and broken English in general. But unlike Dickinson, Bernstein does not believe that only the "first section of Darkness" is dense, or that after that "Light trembles in." For him, darkness will never be touched by day. The grieving person's only hope is to attain some form of comfort in the darkness of the unknown. Although he did not ask for the knowledge gained from such spiritual darknesses, he adapts to the dark, and uses his language—pregnant with dysraphisms, imploded sentences, revised aphorisms, and other linguistic forms of prehensive experience—to reach out into the unknown, the great unknown of the physical and metaphysical alike.

WRITING ON THE MARGINS OF SOUND AND SIGHT
Augusto de Campos and Transnational Poetic Traditions

This is how legendary Brazilian poet Augusto de Campos described the role of poetry in a recent talk:

> In a world where words often seem to have worn out in discourses that spread hate, race discrimination and stimulate social selfishness, perhaps poetry can be an oasis of meditation and sensibility. Who knows if the poetic speculations, even if seemingly inutilitary, deserve no greater appreciation, in order not only to bring beauty, but to combat the sclerosis of language and to show examples of freedom in experimentation and the unforeseen. ("Acceptance Speech")

Citing Mayakovsky—that all poetry is a journey into the unknown—, Campos suggests that this trip "may have a more necessary meaning than the apparent one. By putting emphasis on changing and not just expressing, perhaps poetry, in some way, may [...] help to resensitize us before the 'unanswered questions' of our existence." These words—which I have taken from the speech given by Campos when accepting the Janus Pannonius Grand Prize for Poetry, also called the Nobel Prize for Poetry, in Pécs, Hungary, September 2017—give, I believe, a valid transcript of the poet's *summa vitae*.

Let's examine his poetry from the perspective of these claims. How has his poetry combated the "sclerosis of language"? How has it offered "examples of freedom in experimentation and the unforeseen"? As "a journey into the unknown," how has poetry helped "to resensitize us before the 'unanswered question' of our existence"? And finally, what kind of poetry has emphasized "changing rather than expressing"?

Throughout the sixty-five years of his writing career, Campos has continued to act upon the avant-garde imperative of incessant innovation and to establish connections with international poetic traditions. A "concrete poet," he founded the group *Noigandres* together with his brother, Haroldo de Campos, and friend Décio Pignatari in the 1950s. The magazine *Noigandres* would become the number one outlet of Brazilian concrete poetry to bring together Latin-American experiments and to tie into the international movement being formed at the time. The group was

as unusual as the name *Noigandres*, a word without a referent, a sound construct taken from Ezra Pound's "Canto XX," originating in a poem of the Occitan troubadour poet Arnault Daniel (1180–1210).

Taking off from the more static forms offered by the printed page—ideogram, spatial form, wordplays, permutations, and transformations—step by step, he incorporated the possibilities granted by the new technologies, thus allowing an unprecedented kinetic freedom in his installations, electronic displays, laser holograms, and performances. "Poetry is risk," he famously insists (on his 1995 CD), a "journey into the unknown," in which color, sound, and movement work together in the "tongue journey" across languages to create what he calls the "verbivocovisual," a material union of the verbal (sense), sound, and sight.

Concrete poetry

As the embodiment of the experimental ethos of fifties poetics to create "poetic objects," concrete poetry was striving towards objectivity and impersonality in the sense that it denounced the Cartesian "I," the "lyrical ego," waiting to be "expressed" by the poet. Poets who insisted on the emptying out of this lyrical subjectivity and the expressive-subjective-confessional voice associated with it, contributed to the particular paradigm change the poetry of the 50s went through from Latin America to the US and (Western) Europe.

This internationally instituted paradigm change—the continuation of earlier radical poetics (of the Russian Futurists, for example)—consisted in a recurrent emphasis on the pictorial and iconic, as well as object-like nature of the poem, as opposed the figurative and abstract. As Campos puts it in his answers to a questionnaire, "Concrete poets may be differentiated from other experiences (zaum, lettrisme, phonetic poetry) for not rejecting semantic values but rather placing them on equal footing with other material, visual, and sonorous parameters of the poem" (*Questionnaire*).

Proclaiming the imperative of continual invention and innovation, it aims at the pursuit of new forms. These new forms involve, Campos insists, "radicalization and condensation," "graphic experiences," the "suppression [...] of syntactic links," an "emphasis on the nondiscursive character of poetry," and in general "making explicit the materiality of language in its visual and sonorous dimensions" (*Questionnaire*).

Campos published his first manifesto in 1956, *Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto [Poesia concreta: um manifesto],* to be followed by *Pilot Plan for Concrete Poetry*

[plano-piloto da poesia concreta], written by the *Noigandres* founding fathers, Augusto and Haroldo de Campos, and Décio Pignatari, and by the anthology collecting their critical writings and manifestos, *Teoria da poesia concreta* in 1965. Reasserting indeed the "international prospects" of Brazilian avant-garde poetry, the *concretistas* of the 1950s proposed, as Roland Greene puts it, "the critical ingestion of European culture" by naming Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, and the lyrics of Pound, Cummings, and Mayakovsky as the regnant international influences on Brazilian poetry and poetics" ("From Dante to the Post-Concrete"). They defined the concrete poem as a visual constellation in these early writings, a "magnetic field of possibilities" ("Manifesto") informed by graphic space as a structuring agent. In particular, they appropriated Ezra Pound's "ideogrammic synthesis of meaning" where the ideogram becomes "a relational field of functions" as well as Joyce's "sentient 'verbivocovisual' totality" (*Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto*).

Above all, he writes,

> The concrete poem communicates its own structure: structure-content. Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings. Its material: word (sound, visual form, semantical charge) [...] Concrete poem [...] creates a specific linguistical area – "verbivocovisual" – which shares the advantages of non-verbal communication, without giving up words virtualities. (*Pilot Plan*)

Historical precedents

Indeed, Brazilian concrete poets very consciously picked their predecessors. As Campos himself claims,

> engaged with the practices of vanguard, experimental or—as it should probably more adequately be called—inventive poetry [...] the task of Concrete poetry, after it appeared in the 50s, was to reestablish contact with the poetry of the vanguards of the beginning of the century (Futurism, Cubofuturism, Dada et alia), which the intervention of two great wars and the proscription of Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships had condemned to marginalization. (*Yale Symphosymposium* 369)

In particular, Campos names Mallarmé, whose "intersemiotic" *Un coup de dés* offered a model of "fragmentary structure [...] conjoining visual mural and musical score"; Pound, in whose *Cantos* he identified not only the ideogrammic method but also the collage technique and metalanguage; Joyce, with the "vocabulistic kaleidoscope" and "textual polyreadings" of *Finnegans Wake*; "the experimental, minimalist, and molecular prose of Gertrude Stein"; and the "atomization and syntactical dislocation" in E. E. Cummings (*Yale Symphosymposium* 376). Campos adds a particular generation of musicians and composers to his list too: "the Vienna Group (Schoenberg, Webern, Berg), [...] the great individual experimentalists (Ives, Varese, etc.), and the [...] new vanguard composers, from Boulez to Stockhausen to Cage" (*Questionnaire*).

Moreover, he picked his predecessors in poetic theory as well, such innovative practitioners of poetic theory as Paul Valéry, as well as the Russian Formalists and the Prague Circle. From Valéry, he adopted the imperative *résistance au facile*, that is, a resistance to the "easy"—the easily understandable text; from the linguists, he took over the definition of poetic language as departure, a systematic deviation," from the "norm" of everyday language. The poet, as the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky claims, will adopt the device of making the familiar strange *(остранение)* in an act of "creative deformation," whereby an "organized violence" is committed on ordinary language, as Jakobson puts it (see Erlich 176 ff).

Concrete poetry techniques

Let's examine the techniques of the concrete poem. The *concretistas* found Pound's compositional method most useful, which they had applied from the *Cantos* (translated by Campos too). The ideogram offers a unique tool for realizing the coexistence of space and time contributing to the poem's prosodic structure. For much like Pound, Campos considers the ideogram a prosodic category, a visual prosodic category, which blends the rhythmic structure and visual representation of words into a cognitive unity. Originally inspired by Ernest Fenollosa, this method works with what Kenneth Goldsmith calls "unadorned *sans-sérif* language": it strips words of their syntactic valencies—suffixes, prefixes, connectives—in the "non-illusionistic space," or "the plane of the white page" (*From [Command] Line to [Iconic] Constellation*). Moreover, taking words from different languages and thereby transgressing the boundaries of individual languages, its vocabulary is consciously multilingual. A multilingual vocabulary will not only contribute to the internationalism of the movement, but foreground the materiality of language, so

that words will be less understood for their sense, rather be perceived for their look on the page, sound, tactility, and materiality in general—as body, mass, matter.

As such, linearity is replaced by spatiality in the concrete poem, logical connection by association, subordination by coordination, hypotaxis by parataxis. We have complex visual units created in two-dimensional space, which over-writes syntax, so to speak, and the autonomous artwork or visual constellation is achieved. The *concretistas* developed as technique similar to that of the Russian Futurists, who "shook syntax loose" (qtd by Nancy Perloff, *Explodity* 57), and, as Perloff explains, placed words "next to each other [...] to acquire new, lateral (semantic) associations through the unexpected 'crisscrossing of meanings'" (67).

The poem is neither self-expression nor a narrative-discursive account with relation to a particular referent; it simply means.

> Concrete poem is an object in and by itself, not an interpreter of exterior objects and/or more or less subjective feelings. Its material: word (sound, visual form, semantical charge). Its problem: a problem of functions-relations of this material. (*Pilot Plan*)

The primary technique of the ideogram is constituted by reduction and concentration, the pressing of sentences into minute poems, the finding of the "least common multiple of language," as they claim in *Pilot Plan*. Stripped of explicit relational words, the poem will rely on space and matter to establish connections; this is what they call, after Ernst Cassirer, "inner grammar" or "pure relational syntax," whose idea was inspired by the Chinese language (or at least, Fenollosa's understanding of it). Such reduction and concentration will result in a minimalist poem-object, often just a handful of words, or even just one word, as the end-product of a procedure of extracting the essence of the sentence.
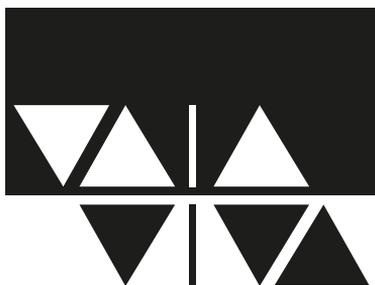
"Viva / Vaia" is a one-word poem, or more precisely, two words pressed into a one-unit ideogram, playing with the contrast of background and foreground, so it reads as either VIVA or VAIA (Hurrah / Bravo or Hissing / boo), suggesting that the boundary between acceptance and resistance is permeable; and that there is a very obvious ambivalence of love and hate. This evokes, as Nancy Perloff put it in her talk on Campos given in Budapest, "the confrontation between the artist and the audience in the popular music scene in Brazil, mid to late 60s" ("Behind the Scenes"). Moreover, Perloff points out, if we just read the geometric shapes as triangles and hexagons (and not shapes made of meaningful letters), "the upside-down triangles become street signs," evoking an urban atmosphere. Again, what Perloff terms as the Russian Futurist's "new attention to the independent word," together with their concept of "sound as such" and "image as such" come to mind (*Explodity* 57, 66, 75).

Moving on to the second technique the concrete poem applies, we have what Campos calls the "verbivocovisual." Explaining the word coined by Joyce and the compositional principle of the *verbivocovisual*, Campos says, "the materiality of the word was given new emphasis: the *voco* and the *visual*, the sound and the graph or the significant live here in equal condition with the *verbi* or the signified" (qtd. in Greene). So *verbivocovisual* happily conjoins all three dimensions—semantic, sonorous, and visual—in concrete poetry.

The semantic dimension involves the axiom that language is a system of signs capable of generating complex meanings. But for Campos, meanings are not produced by some smooth and easy referentiality—language's pointing function, pointing to the world outside—but by signifiers interacting with one another producing difference. As Marjorie Perloff writes in her Janus Pannonius laudation, in 2017,

> concrete poetry carried to its logical extreme the poetic notion, made clear by the great Russian Formalist Roman Jakobson, that whereas in ordinary language use, there is no relationship between, say, *fig* and *figment*, poetry is precisely that discourse where the relationship between the two matters. Indeed, in poetry, any phonological or visual coincidence is felt to mean semantic kinship. Not *what is related* but the *relationship* itself is what counts. ("Laudation Speech")

The poem "Viver – Sorrir – Sofrir – Morrer" serves as an example for the foregrounding of such semantic relationship deriving from phonological or visual coincidence.

This poem is an ideogram made up of four words piled on top of one another, *live – smile – suffer – die* in English, or, in terms of letter size, *viver – morrer – sorrir – sofrir [live – die – smile – suffer].* In other words, you have morphological units with a shared structure, suggesting the semantic unity of a life cycle: to live, to smile, to suffer, to die—these acts form one continuity.

Here is a more complex example, the well-known "Cidadecitycité," made up of a long undivided line of word roots that might end in the suffix *–cidade, -city, -cité* in Portuguese, English, and French, respectively.
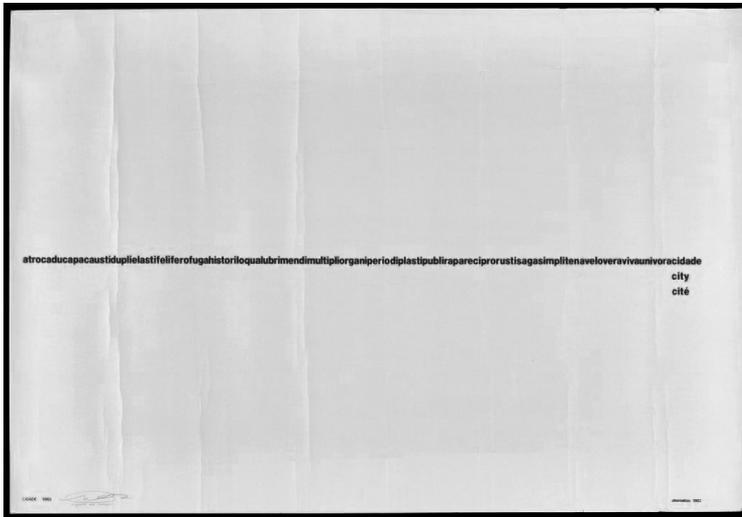
First, here are the word roots: *atro, cadu, causti, elasti, feli, fero, fuga, histori, loqua, lubri, mendi, multipli, organi, periodi, plasti, publi, rapa, recipro, rusti, saga, simpli, tena, uni, velo, vera, viva, vora.* And here are the suffixed nouns constructed out of the roots and the suffixes: *atrocity, caducity, causticity, elasticity, felicity, ferocity, fugacity, historicity, loquacity, lubricity, mendicity, multiplicity, organicity, periodicity, plasticity, publicity, rapacity, reciprocity, rusticity, sagacity, simplicity, tenacity, unicity, velocity, veracity, vivacity, voracity.*

In the newer version, we get the words in Morse code too:

Note that the Morse code as a visual construct prefigures the city's lights; this prefiguring will get a confirmation once we see the multimedia event performed together with his son, composer and poet Cid Campos:

The digital version reaches a new dimension as the suffixes take on a life of their own, with the multilingual function words *–city/-cite/-cidade* interact with the abstract words making up the sights and sounds of the city. In other words, the interacting abstractions of word roots and suffixes together make up a very concrete concrete city: by always adding the formal unit of the English suffix *–city* (as well as its Portuguese and French versions, *-cidade* and *–cité*) to the same word roots to create nouns in three languages, the city itself becomes (and here I am simply giving synonyms for the suffixed words): brutal, cruel, horrifying; transitory, perishable, decrepit, senile; corrosive, eating away; elastic, resilient; happy; ferocious, fierce, violent, intense; fleeting, evanescent; of historical actuality; loquacious, talkative; lubricious; wanton, without check; full of beggars; multiple and various; organic, alive; periodical, regularly recurrent; alternating, molded, altered ; public; rapacious, ravenous, living on prey; reciprocal, mutually independent; rustic, rural; sagacious, of acute discernment; simple, uncomplicated; tenacious, cohesive, persistent; unique of its kind; quick, swift; accurate, truthful; vivacious, lively, sprightly; voracious, ravenous, insatiable.

The second dimension of the verbivocovisual refers to the materiality of words and sounds, their acoustic, auditive, and musical qualities not subordinated to syntax and semantics. Much like the Russian Futurists broke language apart and disobeyed the rules of grammar,[1] the *concretistas* also used noise as sound and

[1]   Russian Futurists announced in their 1913 manifesto, "We've ceased to regard word-construction and word pronunciation according to grammatical rule, having begun to see in letters only *directions of speech.* We shook syntax loose" (qtd by Nancy Perloff, *Explodity* 57).

created what the Russian Futurists called "transrational structures" (N. Perloff, *Explodity* 60). We have several such poems in *Poetamenos,* the 1953 poem cycle that was the first to put into practice the abstract principle of verbivocovisuality. Inspired by Schönberg and Webern, who experimented with the color of sound in their *Klangfarbenmelodie*, Campos withdrew his words from the domination of syntax and subordinated them to graphic or color pattern. Theme or thematic is omitted, to be replaced by linguistic units such as phrase, word, syllable, sound to act quite like musical instruments act in an orchestra.
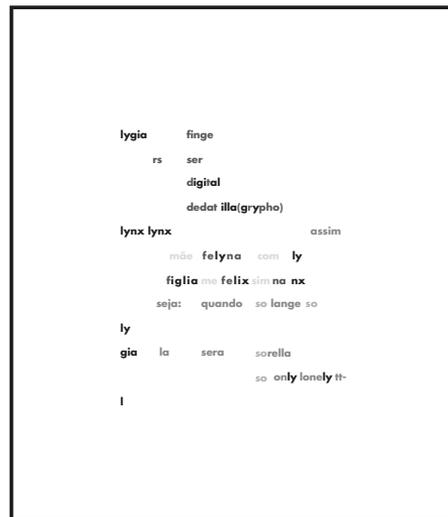
The multilingual poem "Lygia Fingers" (Lygia Fingers) turns on the number five. It has words in five colors: red, green, yellow, blue, and purple, emphasizing the deconstruction of language units into smaller ones in five languages: English, Latin, Italian, German, and Portuguese. The five colors and five languages obviously correspond to the five fingers that are capable of a variety of actions: they can pretend (*finge*), typewrite (*datilografar*), and even turn into 'glyph' or 'griffin' (*grypho*). All this is put in a language construct "bristling," as Marjorie Perloff puts it in her brilliant discussion of the poem, "with puns and *double entendres*" (*Unoriginal* 68). For example, "Lygia has morphed into a *lynx*, a feline creature (*felyna*), but also a daughter figure (*figlia*), who makes, in a shift from Italian to Latin, *me felix* (me happy) (68). Now the suffix *–ly*, the paragram Lygia's name is turned into, occurs five times again, "twice color coded so as to stand out from the word in which it is embedded" (68). Here the language into German and Italian, keeping up the

puns and *double entendres* in both, by bringing in a beautifully sounding name (*Solange Sohl*), or phrase (*so lange sohl*), for the "ideal beloved in the Provençal manner," and morphing the second syllable of Lygia's name into an ambiguous *gia la sera sorella* ('already evening, sister'/'longed-for evening'). Multiplying the poem's punning derived from the semantics of spatial design, the conclusion comes in an English "whisper or tap of *tt* and a single liquid sound" (68). As such, "overall verbivocovisual composition" seems to carry the poem, with a closure on pure materiality, sound, and visual composition.

> "Lygia" thus emerges as a troubadour lyric made new: the time frame of the *audabe* or *plnh* gives way to the spatial-aural construct of this amourous *Klangfarbenmelodie.* The love song, moreover, nicely ironizes its conventional subject matter: Lygia, bith lynx and digital, has her own tricks, and in any case the figure of Solange Sohl looms in the background. (69)

The third element of the verbivocovisual refers to the visual dimension of poetry, simultaneous spatial form, taking over the job of linearity. The ideogrammic method and the montage structure closely related to it allow for a most effective exploitation of space, where words, word fragments, letters, or word montages are piled on top of one another, bringing about a very tight structure. Among these tightly structured ideograms, one should mention the circle poem "Rose," the poet's visual transcreation of Gertrude Stein's famous dictum.
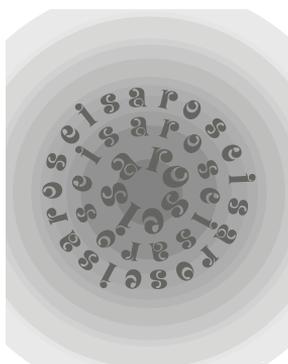
"Rose," as Marjorie Perloff points out, "beautifully enacts the concept" of the "continuous present" as explained in "Composition as Explanation": "The sentence 'A rose is a rose is a rose' does not begin or end anywhere: begin reading the

concentric circles wherever you like and the clause is read as continuing" (*Unoriginal* 70). Moreover, I'd like to add, in this sentence with multifunctional—and thereby always ambiguous and indeterminate—syntactic units, the nominal element *rose* of the predicate phrase *is a rose* turns into the subject of the next (continuous) sentence, which right away turns into predicate again, as visual circularity is counterpointed by grammatical or syntactic circularity. Indeed, as Perloff aptly remarks, while Stein's sentence remains linear, "in his visual variant Augusto has found a way to apply Stein's two other principles from 'Composition as Explanation' as well: 'beginning again and again' and 'using everything'" (*Unoriginal* 70).

Such poems will demand a very different reading from the one we are used to. The reader must unlearn semantic interpretation and mobilize faculties other than the cognitive ones normally employed in thinking and contemplation: several senses must be mobilized here in order to see the poem as sight, hear it as sound, sometimes even touch it, taste it, smell it. At the same time, the reader must also resist the expectation of referentiality: for the poem refuses to be a window on the world—moreover, Campos insists, we must familiarize ourselves with the idea that a world beyond language might not even exist.

Philosophy of language

Campos defines concrete poetry as having taken "a position as a poetics of objectivity, attempting simply to place its premises at the roots of language" (*Questionnaire*). In this regard, he reveals a kinship with Charles Olson, the leading figure of US postmodern poetry, who argued for a particularizing use of language in several influential essays, and also realized this non-expressive and non-metaphorical poetics in his poetic practice. He insists that the metaphors built into language actually act as breaks on thinking, while textuality comes about not by reference to the world outside but by signifying processes mobilized in reading. The source of all knowledge is language itself, while poetic form involves the materiality of language, the physical space allowing for the interaction of words, which is, in other words, comes down to the intertextual and material character of writing.

The poet taking the imperative of condensation seriously works with a consciously reduced lexicon, having eliminated all the relativizing syntactic connectives necessary for creating phrases and sentences. At the same time, this poet

moves with ease between linguistic and non-linguistic levels, withdrawing from language its narrative-expressive potential. The poet does not wish to narrate a story or express a feeling; the aim of writing consists simply in making the reader perceive, and even feel, language, which is no longer considered a tool but a material to be worked. The concrete poet uses language as a sculptor uses clay or stone: forms it, carves it, synthesizes meanings to "create a sentient 'verbivocovisual' totality" (*Concrete Poetry: A Manifesto*). By doing this, Campos continues, "the concrete poet does not turn away from words, he does not glance at them obliquely: he goes directly to their center, in order to live and vivify their facticity." Not allowing the irrelevant to divert the poet's attention, he [or she] will let the spatially structured linguistic units take over the function of syntax.

The poetics that demands a going directly to the center is framed by a particular philosophy of language. Not only does the concrete poet proclaim language to provide the limits and the grounds of our world, but also advocates the conviction that everything we know about the world we know from language. This is why Campos so favors puns and coincidences: to highlight the linguistic origin of knowledge.

The poem "Caracol" traces the process of taking on and taking off the mask (*mascara*) by simply connecting words to be then dismembered in various ways, while the successive bolding of the letters brings about the slow sliding of the snail (*caracol*).

<pre>
c o l o c o r a m a s
c a r a c o l o c a r
a m a s **c a r a c o l**
o c a r a m a s **c a r**
a c o l o c a r a m a
s **c a r a c o l** o c a
r a m a s **c a r a c o**
l o c a r a m a s **c a**
r a c o l o c a r a m
a s **c c c c c c c** o c
a r a n a s **c a r a c**
o l o c a r a m a s **c**
a r a c o l o c a r a
m a s **c a r a c o l** o
c a r a m a s **c a r a**
</pre>

Applying word and letter puns, these pieces constitute the representative works of concrete poetry, where the poet performs a very particular gesture: lets signifiers create meaning, recalling the Russian Futurist concept again, "THE WORD BROADER THAN SENSE" (N. Perloff, *Explodity* 59). In other words, by allowing the dance of letters to bring about "content," he relieves himself of the responsibility to make sense. The poem *Luxo* provides perhaps the best example for this technique, where by using the morphological unit LUXO as the building block for another word LIXO (garbage, waste), the constellation of letters bring about the proposition: luxury produces waste.

```
LUXO        LUXO        LUXO      LUXO       LUXOLUXOLUXO
LUXO        LUXO        LUXO    LUXO         LUXOLUXOLUXO
LUXO        LUXO         LUXO  LUXO          LUXOLUXOLUXO
LUXO        LUXO          LUXOLUXO           LUXO      LUXO
LUXO        LUXO         — LUXO —            LUXO      LUXO
LUXO        LUXO          LUXOLUXO           LUXO      LUXO
LUXOLUXO    LUXO         LUXO  LUXO          LUXOLUXOLUXO
LUXOLUXO    LUXO        LUXO    LUXO          LUXOLUXOLUXO
LUXOLUXO    LUXO       LUXO      LUXO         LUXOLUXOLUXO
```

Similarly, three words—AMOR, MORTE, TEMOR—make up the pyramid in the poem "amortemor", where the words do not simply meet but overlap, thus they can be cut at various points to make *a-mor, mor-te, te-mor*. By showing that these signifiers are actually impossible to separate, the poet concludes that the concepts themselves are ultimately inseparable too: love, death, and fear seem to embrace each other in the eternal chain of being.

```
              A M O R
            A M O R
          A M O R R
        A M O R T R
      A M O R T E R
    A M O R T E M R
  A M O R T E M O R
A M O R T E M O R
```

"Word things," performativity

The concrete poet proclaiming the principle of objectivity seems to take extreme pleasure in making pictorial poetry or object poetry familiar from the classic con-

crete-visual tradition. These linguistic objects live in space and/or time; they are "poem-products" that are "useful objects," as claimed in *Pilot Plan*, capable of energy discharge.

In these poems, Campos brings together the formerly dismembered units of language in such a way that he exploits the performative function of language while limiting the descriptive-constative function. He can do this by performing objects and performing processes; in Campos's terminology, via "nounising" or "verbification" (*Pilot Plan*). The two modes correspond to the two modes of structuring information, topic and comment. Thus, Campos resorts to topic writing mode in his pieces bringing about an autonomous object (from which the verbal elements are missing), while he employs comment writing mode in his reductionist-minimalist pieces (from which nominal elements are absent).

To give examples, in his topic poems Campos assigns object performativity to his text: the linguistic material becomes a concrete object. It is by the classic "power of the word" that the poet brings about a linguistic object that did not exist before: an object which ranks with objects of the physical world. In addition to such topic poems as "The Rose" and "Ovonovelo" also serves as an example of topic writing mode, with the word turning into the object coming about, in the text, as words wind into balls.

```
        o v o
      n o v e l o
    novo no velho
   o filho em folhas
   na jaula dos joelhos
   infante em fonte
    f e t o   f e i t o
     d e n t r o   d o
        centro

         nu
      des do nada
     a l e   o   h u m
    ano mero nu
    mero do zero
   crua criança incru
    stada no cerne da
     carne viva en
       fim nada

          o
       p o n t o
    onde se esconde
   lenda ainda antes
   e n t r e v e n t r e s
   quando queimando
    o s   s e i o s   s ã o
     p e i t o s   n o s
        dedos

         no
      turna noite
    em torno em treva
   turva sem contarno
   morte negro nó cego
   sano do morcego nu
   ma sombra que o pren
   dia preta letra que
     s e   t o r n a
        sol
```

augusto de campos

Comment poems are more recent, owing their existence to modern electronic technologies applied by the poet to enact the processes he needs. A process is being performed in such comment poems as "pluvial," enacting the movement of rain dropping, dripping, pouring. "O Pulsar" also seems to turn on similar performative processes, performing the pulsing by inserting empty spaces in the linear structure.

Saying and doing are one in these poems, indeed; they say what they do and do what they say. The poet creating an object or enacting a process out of words abides by the classic Austinian performativity concept: although the form created by words evokes the real form, this representation cannot be called either true or false. Instead, the performative utterance—the concrete poem in this case—brings into being an object or process that now exists with other physical objects or processes in the physical world that has extra-linguistic existence in the realm of the signified. Framed by the modern episteme, in particular by the cognitive schemas of structuralism, these performative creations can be aptly called logocentric for their emphatic acceptance of signifier and signified, or Foucauldian words and things.

But can the poet really believe that concrete poetry actually brings about concrete objects or enacts concrete events? The raindrops, the pulsations, or the ball spins are not "real"; rather, they draw attention—much like Magritte's well-known *la Trahison des images (Ceci n'est pas une pipe)*—to the "treason" of images, the problematic nature of representation.

Moreover, does the poet not exhibit the playfulness so characteristic of iconic poetry since the Renaissance, trying to give the illusion of making "real" objects with an existence in the real physical world?

So the question arises, what is it that is being performed in the poem performing objects or enacting processes out of letters and words? Can the poet—by trying to

return to the original meaning of the poet, ποιητής (*poiētḗs*)—indeed create objects with an existence in the physical reality? In other words, what is the object of the performative act in this case, of a poet with a serious ontological doubt concerning a world beyond language and the possibility of stepping outside discourse, and with an even more serious epistemological doubt concerning the knowability of a world beyond language?

Leaving behind the logocentric understanding of the performative, framed by the modern episteme, and applying the poststructuralist framework informed by the postmodern episteme, my answer is this: the poet does not make objects or enact processes in the physical world, but remains in discourse where he actually constructs himself as linguistic subject, speaking agent.

He assigns such agency to himself that will allow him to create a ball of an egg, pulsation, or raindrops, albeit within language, within discourse. His subjectivity thus constructed is not Cartesian: it does not precede the concrete poetic utterance but comes about by the performative act itself. Which also means that the subject returns to the concrete poem in a very particular way: not as the object of expressive-mimetic attention, but as both subject and object of the performative.

With this radical gesture, Augusto de Campos takes the final step to leave behind the lyrical paradigm of expressive verse: this poet does not express a self pre-existing the poem but accepts that his self is the ultimate product of the performative process enacted in the poem. As such, he breaks in a definitive manner with all urges of the Cartesian subject to make himself—as well as his thoughts, feelings, experiences—the object of his own attention. Having indeed suppressed the self-expressing poetic ego, and having replaced the Cartesian subject with language as material, concrete poetry represents the most radical departure from the lyric.

HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION, ROUGH BOOK POETRY, AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE SELF
Susan Howe and the Olsonian Tradition

In *21st-Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics*, Marjorie Perloff discusses the tradition of innovative poetics spanning the period from the early 20th century to the early 21st. Instead of the more usual modernism/postmodernism formula, dividing this tradition into Pound's generation and Olson's generation, as done, among others, by Donald M. Allen and Warren Tallman (ix), Jerome Rothenberg and George Quasha (xxix), and Allen Ginsberg (*Composed on the Tongue* 12–13; *Allen Verbatim* 162), Perloff posits one continuous trajectory of poetic practice informed by "the notion of *doing something else*" (163).

> [T]he avant-garde momentum of the early decades of the twentieth century has found new channels—channels mediated […] by a succession of avant-gardes from the Objectivists of the 1930s, to the John Cage circle and its intersection with New York poetry/painting and Black Mountain in the 1950s and 1960s, to the performance poetries and ethnopoetics of the 1970s. (164)

Perloff's counter-paradigm of a "succession of avant-gardes" does not only allow the radical modernism of Pound, Williams, and Stein to find its continuation in the Objectivists, the Black Mountain poets, the Beats, and the other post-World War II poetic formations, but also to (re)establish its connections with poetries outside the usual box of modernist innovations, among these, with Eliotic "sound/meaning conjunctions" (159) and Khlebnikov's *zaum* (170). More importantly, this synthetic paradigm sets the innovators apart from what Charles Bernstein calls "official verse culture" (*Content's Dream* 246–49), whose discourse, Perloff insists, "is a conventionalized and institutionalized […] mass discourse" (155). Perloff names several widely held tenets held by "official verse culture" yet rejected by the "succession of avant-gardes." Among these, we have the insistence that poetry "involves lineated verbal—and only verbal text"; the lineated text consists of "orderly" "text column[s] with white space around the stanzas"; poetry is always lyric, that is, the "expression of a particular subject […] whose voice provides the cement that keeps individual references and insights together"; its language is "'natural' and colloquial"; and finally "a poem conveys its feelings and ideas only by means of indirection—which

is to say, by metaphor and irony" (158). In such poetry, which is really "most poetry currently written," Perloff continues,

> [a] generic "sensitive" lyric speaker contemplates a facet of his or her world and makes observations about it, compares present to past, divulges some hidden emotion, or comes to a new understanding of the situation. The language is usually concrete and colloquial, ironies and metaphors multiple, the syntax straightforward, the rhythms muted and low-key. Generic and media boundaries are rigorously observed: no readymades or word sculptures here, no *zaum* explorations of etymologies, no Steinian syntactic permutations. (161–62)

Such poetry has taken the "path of least resistance" (163), and approaches the "condition" of journalism—a form of writing as harmless as it is ephemeral," Perloff concludes (164).

I have recapitulated Perloff's points and arguments at such length because the poet I discuss in the present study, Susan Howe (who is actually Perloff's first example), fully exemplifies, in her poetic assertions and rejections alike, the avant-garde impulse running to the early 21st century. I explore some of the most significant traits of Howe's avant-garde practice, reflecting on her ties to the tradition that has involved, as she put it in a discussion, the "breaking of boundaries of all sorts," while echoing an "undervoice [...] peculiarly American" ("Encloser" 192).

I identify the following areas where Howe's "breaking of boundaries" ties her not just to the "undervoice" running through the century long avant-garde impulse, but to Olson in particular: her poetry of historical reconstruction informed by an urge to a return to origins, closely related to the historical interest of "going back" to points before things went wrong; her rough book poetry informed by a return to a cognitive state not governed by habitualized patterns of thinking, manifest in a poetic language that disregards the rules of grammar and a page that resists the conventions of normal typography, while also allows the inclusion of nonverbal materials; her dissolution of the self, whereby the "lyrical I" is suppressed, in particular by the reversal of topic-comment relations and the use of discursive filters.

The first two areas seem to be informed by the Olsonian idea of *apocatastasis*, while the third by the tenet of objectism. But while I detect Olson's primary influence in these areas, I also emphasize Howe's innovative reworkings of these tenets,

whereby she has departed from Olson's "undervoice." Before presenting the two versions of Howe's *apocatastasis* mode, I discuss Olson's original concept briefly.

Olson's *apocatastasis*

Apocatastasis, the idea referring to the reconstitution of an original state in history, knowing, and writing, can be detected in Olson's urge to return to origins as well as to cognitive and linguistic states that precede habitualized patterns of thinking. The poet, he insists, must go back in history, thought, and words, where phenomena show themselves in their actuality and rawness. As he puts it in the short poetic fragment "These days,"

> These days
> whatever you have to say, leave
> the roots on, let them
> dangle
>
> And the dirt
>
>> just to make clear
>> where they come from.

Olson is known for his scholarly interest in history, origin, and firstness. In the poem "On first Looking out through Juan de la Cosa's Eyes" he problematizes the possibility of firstness through the figure of Juan de la Cosa, cartographer and early explorer of the West Indies, captain of the *Niña* in 1493 and Columbus' "Chief Chart Maker." His interest in beginnings figures in the insistence on the distinction between *seeing* and *recognizing*, perceiving and interpreting. Indeed, Olson registers what la Cosa sees and not what he might recognize from existing narratives. Since he did not know he landed in the "New World," he did not recognize a cultural concept, but saw waters of cod and lands surrounded by deep mud banks to be sounded. Not using the abstraction of aerial maps but his own eyes only, he remained part of the scene that captured the viewer in a new circumstance. This implies that he still saw the land not as "other" but simply as "different," with an identity of its own.

Olson celebrates *apocatastasis* in several other poems as well, as process and textuality, the interconnectedness of textuality, or the processional textuality of memory and imagination. This is his topic of "The chain of memory is resurrection," attesting to his fascination with his supposedly Hungarian background.[1]

> All that has been
> suddenly is: time
> is the face
> of recognition, Rhoda Straw; or my son
> is a Magyar. [...]
>   *apocatastasis*
> how it occurs, that in this instant I seek to speak
> as though the species were a weed-seed a grass a barley corn
> in the cup of my palm. [...]
>   Resurrection
> is. It is the avowal. It is the admission. The renewal
> is the restoration

The poem ties into the process of remembering, recreating the momentum of the soul's "onslaught," the human capacity for *apocatastasis*, the soul's attack against time and death. It seems that the poet's Hungarian roots also figure in his idea of *apocatastasis*. Even though he could not have known that in Hungarian the words *onslaught [támadás]* and *resurrection [feltámadás]* have the same root, he connects the two, suggesting no less than the overcoming of death via staying in process.

The pull of the idea of his Hungarian roots seems to be explained by his understanding of the Hungarian language as having roots and dirt dangling on words.

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[1] There are several other references to his Hungarian background. In a letter to Robert Creeley dated May 27, 1950, he refers to the family name of his grandmother, Lybeck (Lübeck), as being Hungarian (*Correspondence* 1: 51). This supposedly exotic identification appears also in the Berkeley reading: "That's because I am a Hungarian" (*Mathologos* 1: 131). On the same page with this reference in volume one of the *Olson-Creeley Correspondence* he cites the Hungarian mathematician Farkas Bolyai and his famous metaphor of the violet-like coincidence of new thoughts: "It is here again c. 1825 Bolyai Farkas, to Bolyai Janos: 'Son, when men are needed they spring up, on all sides, like violets, come the season.' (*Correspondence* 1: 51)". The original quote reads: "many things have an epoch, in which they are found at the same time in several places, just as the violets appear on every side in spring" (see the notes to *Olson-Creeley Correspondence* 1: 164). He refers to this remark in other poems as well, among them "The Story of an Olson, and Bad Thing" and "Apollonius of Tyana."

This is probably why he took such pleasure in having had a grandmother who spoke a non-Indo-European language, a language that was at one time only spoken. As Robert Creeley writes in his "Preface" to the Hungarian collection of Olson's poetry,

> Olson wrote me years ago that he had laid a trap for Ezra Pound, as he put it, "abt my Swedish ancestry (very factual; that the family name Lybeck was Lubeck, was, sd my Grandmother, Hungarian […]" Even so, it is the implicit echoes of "Hungarian" itself, as a language and movement of people, which must have pleased him. It reaches beyond the enclosure of the Indo-European to a world one has only as words spoken, which last would have been his delight. (Olson, *Semmi egyéb a nemzet* 13)

Probably the most important feature of Olson's concept of *apocatasasis* refers to the desire to go back to an original state of perceiving, preceding knowing and understanding. This original state means the state that precedes thinking in given concepts and cultural paradigms (as well as in polished full sentences) with the aim that the poet be able to register the processes of perception and experience without the cognitive ordering and totalizing interpretation of cultural paradigms. The idea of projective verse and field composition served exactly this purpose: to not halt the writing process by the fitting of perception into preexisting cognitive, linguistic, and poetic categories, but retain the energy of the creative moment. For if we imagine the process from perception to conceptual recognition—whereby the poet perceives and interprets the world as well as places this interpretation in the cultural matrix of concepts providing recognition—as a scale, then we see that poetry has predominantly occupied the end domain of this scale, where phenomena gain "meaning." Only very few poets have had the courage to approach the other end of the scale; among these, Emily Dickinson was one to record perceived phenomena in their contingencies, capturing the scene before it became "meaningful" by the interpretive presence of cultural discourse or the eye informed by this discourse. Another such poet was Arthur Rimbaud, Dickinson's close contemporary, whose ideal poetry was capable of slipping out of the shackles of thinking. This is what he demands in the letter written to Paul Demeny on May 15, 1871, and known as the "visionary letter" (*lettre du voyant*), "a long, immense, and calculated derailment of all the senses" whereby "he attains the unknown" (qtd in Adonis 6).[2] This will make

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[2] « un long, immense et raisonné *dérèglement de tous les sens* » [...] « Car il arrive à l'inconnu ! »

it possible to not just feel and think as language has taught us to. Because language is cognition dependent, the perceived objects and processes must be registered before recognition and interpretation; by evading the schemas mediated by paradigms of thinking, experience can be salvaged in the creative process without mediation. If we don't do this, then, as Goethe told his friend Friedrich von Müller, "we only see what we know and understand" (Müller 31).[3] The only way to escape the trap laid by language and the cognitive and cultural paradigms mediated by language is to go back, in the mode of Olson's *apocatastasis*, to a pre-conceptual, pre-schematic state not regulated by cognitive paradigms—to where dirt still dangles on the roots of words...

Howe's poetic reconstruction of history

Howe has complied with the imperative of *apocatastasis* in several manners, of which I discuss two: historical and linguistic-visual *apocatastasis*, or "rough book poetry." Urged by a sense of historical *apocatastasis*, she would open poetry to history, writing poems that indeed include history, as Pound defined the epic (and later his cantos) (*Literary Essays* 86); in particular, her poems carry out evidence-based historical investigations, or Herodotus' mode of history writing, *istorin,* defined by Olson as "finding out for oneself" (*A Special View of History* 20). With history as her favorite subject in school, Howe devoured historical novels, and considered history, fiction, and poetry equally important. As she admits in the *Talisman* interview, "[h]istory and fiction have always been united in my mind [...] it would be hard to think of poetry apart from history" (*The Birth-mark* 158). One reason why Olson has been so important to her is exactly this fusion of poetry and history, she insists, concluding that it's impossible to "divorce poetry from history and culture" (163). Indeed, Howe is following in Olson's footsteps in including little remembered documents into poetry. However, there is a significant difference here: when Olson creates collages out of Gloucester local historical records, documents on Cabeza de Vaca, Mao Tse-tung's speech in French, or William Prescott's *History of the Conquest of Mexico* on Montezuma and Cortez, Howe goes to figures of history who have been made unimportant by the official canonizers. For knowledge, she claims, "involves exclusions and repression. National histories hold ruptures

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[3] *„Man erblickt nur, was man schon weiß und versteht".*

and hierarchies [...] literary canons and master narratives" serve "the legitimation of power" ("Encloser" 178).

Howe will write back into history figures who have fallen through the cracks of historiography. She wishes to pursue the kind of revisionist work which she admires in the scholarship of Patricia Caldwell, who, she claims, is "helping to form a fuller reading of American cultural history" ("Encloser" 176). Famously insisting that "[i]f history is a record of survivors, Poetry shelters other voices," (*The Birth-mark* 47), she will give "shelter" to those who have not survived in canonical histories, among them, Anne Hutchinson, Mary Rowlandson, Hope Atherton, Jean de Labadie, and Esther Johnson. In harmony with the spirit of *apocatastasis*, Howe is preoccupied with the issue of originality, whether trying to locate the actual person serving as the model of Melville's Bartleby (*Melville's Marginalia*) or to reconstruct the original manuscript of *Billy Budd* ("Scattering as behavior Toward Risk"). Defining her own "one voice," her "singularity" as "a search for origins in some sense" ("Encloser" 193), this is how she describes the urge that has propelled her to always go a little further back in history:

> I think there is a continuous peculiar and particular voice in American literature. First I thought it originated with Cotton and Increase Mather, then with early Captivity Narrative, most specifically Mary Rowlandson's, but I kept pulled farther and farther back. Now I see you can trace this voice as far back as 1637 [...]. ("Encloser" 189)

Several of her works attest to her conforming to this impetus, whether documenting the history of Buffalo, her own family, or the wilderness state of the English language. What is common to all is the way Howe uncovers in each the moment that preceded some "crime." As she puts it in *The Difficulties* interview, "[s]ometimes I think my poetry is only a search by an investigator for the point where the crime began" (Beckett 21). Prominent among the crimes searched is colonization; as such, several of her books are devoted to searching the moment preceding colonization, among them, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (1987), *Thorow* (1990), and *The Birth-mark* (1993). In each case she comes to the conclusion, much like Olson, that no absolute point of origin can be identified, whether in the case of the "discovery" of a continent or the founding of a settlement. It is similarly impossible to reach the state of language preceding certain changes, usually for the worse. In vain does she try to reconstruct in the poem "Scattering as Behavior Toward Risk" the state before

deletions and corrections Melville made in the manuscript of *Billy Budd*, the "genetic text" is unreachable, or nonexistent even. The most the poet can do is write backward, reaching earlier and earlier points in the hope of arriving at the brute actuality of being; as she writes in the poem sequence *Arisbe*, "Actuality is something brute / Unspelled Firstness is first" (*Pierce-Arrow* 29).

As is the case with other traits of the Williams-Pound-Olson tradition, Howe follows her predecessors as much as she departs from them. For one, Howe investigates the past in order to understand the present. "The past is the present," she proposes; "We are all part of the background" ("Encloser" 176). She continues,

> Of course I can't *really* bring back a particular time. That's true. Or it's true if you think of time as moving in a particular direction—forward you say. But what if then is now. I hope my work here and elsewhere demonstrates something about the mystery of time. ("Encloser" 176)

"[T]he extensive historical documentation in *Frame Structures*," as Perloff puts it, "thus serves to construct the past that has shaped what Howe takes to be her very palpable present" ("Language Poetry" 428). In other words, the past does not remain past but is understood as one of the forces shaping the present. In other words, when researching the past, Howe actually studies the present. This is why Paul Naylor calls Howe's poetry "investigative," exploring "the linguistic, historical, and political conditions of contemporary culture" (9), and also why Peter Nicholls identifies "temporal reversibility" as one of the main features of her writing, claiming that "poetry is itself a kind of figure for temporal reversibility" ("The Pastness of Landscape" 428).

Ming-Qian Ma summarizes other departures from the Pound-Olson tradition: fusing history and fiction, and erasing the supposedly artificial distinction between the two; taking on a gender-oriented position of being outside hegemonic discourse; and using history with a particular aim, "to subpoena history for an investigation of its violent crimes against women" ("Poetry as History Revised" 717–18). Ma concludes by saying that "poetry becomes for Howe counter-discourse to history" (718). This, I believe, is her most profound departure from the manner the Pound-Olson tradition "includes" history: the overall insistence on creating in poetry a counter-discourse to history. Her poetic counter-discourse to history consists in the documentary reconstruction of Puritan and 19th century history, on the one hand, and in the reconstruction of gendered history on the other.

Howe looks to documents of history, reaching back to Mary Rowlandson, Hope Atherton, and the New English colonizers in *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*, to Anne Hutchinson and King Charles I in *Eikon Basilike*, to Jean de Labadie in *Souls of the Labadie Tract*. When discussing the Puritans, her treatment can be considered revisionary in the sense American historiography has recently affirmed that the central experience of Puritan life was not Messianic enthusiasm but loss and mourning, as well as spiritual doubt, allowing ample room for non-conformism (see Cecilia Tichi on this topic). This is the perception conveyed in Howe's poetry too, insisting that the Puritan era was one of depression and anxiety, while their narratives were, as she puts it, "grief-stricken," stemming from the "state of doubt and pain" that not only characterized their disposition before conversion but also after ("Encloser" 190). Puritan doubt and pain find expression in the fragmented prose Howe develops when capturing the warring selves Puritans tried to hold together, as expressed in the first line of George Goodwin's "Auto-Machia," "I sing my SELF; my *Civil Warrs* within," for example. Howe implements various language strategies in line with this Puritan wrestling tradition marked by a sense of spiritual paralysis and powerlessness; among these we have hesitancies, false starts and restarts, as well as "avant-garde doubling and dismemberings of words," as pointed out by Rachel Tsvia Back (19).

Howe has shown a similarly avid interest in 19th century American history and literature. As she claims in a discussion, "[m]y writing has been haunted and inspired by a series of texts, woven in shrouds and cordage of Classic American 19th century works, they are the buried ones" ("Encloser" 178). She located, for example, the Irish poet James Clarence Mangan, the person Melville supposedly modeled his character Bartleby on (see Megan Williams), and made efforts to reconstruct the "genetic text" of Melville's *Billy Budd* in the poem "Scattering as Behavior toward Risk" (see Ming-Qian Ma, "Poetry as History Revised"). In all these historical reconstructions the language follows the hesitancies and uncertainties at the heart of her reconstructive work.

"I work in the poetic documentary form," Howe claims ("Sorting Facts" 385), collecting, as she writes elsewhere, "documentary histories, registers, and catalogues" (*Frame Structures* 18). Indeed, she has incorporated various historical documents into her poetry, for example, in the early volume *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1978) the two accounts of William Byrd, *History of the Dividing Line* (1728) and the personal account not intended for publication, *Secret History of the Dividing Line* (1929); these two texts serve as the frame for the body of the poem in between.

The third "foundational text," as Black calls it (23), is the war correspondence and diary of Judge Oliver Wendell Holmes, *Touched with Fire: Civil War Letters and Diary of Oliver Wendell Holmes*, edited by Howe's Harvard law professor father. Her method is twofold here, adopting the scattered, dismembered voice of the personal document, while also incorporating whole passages broken into verse lines or quoted fully. This is the mode of writing employed in the long poem *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* published in *Singularities* (1990), where, by using historical documents, Howe makes visible the forgotten figure of the ill-fated American minister Hope Atherton.

This is also the mode employed in the other verse cycle of *Singularities*, *Thorow*, in which already the title contains documents of sorts, referring to word history, as it has embedded three non-words: the misspelling of Thoreau's name (as used by Hawthorne) and the archaic forms of *through, and throw*. As the title indicates, the poet has gone to find traces of the wild in language, carried by misspellings and archaisms, all immanently contained in language. This search for what is hidden in language will allow the poet to uncover the physical and spiritual state of wilderness. The adventure is symbolically led by the author of *Walden*, as not only the title indicates but also the many Thoreauvian nouns (among them, *cove, mud, shrub, cusk, cedar, grease, splint, drisk, islet, bateau, arrowhead, Messenger* from *The Maine Woods* and *Walden*) scattered across the pages to form a layered catalogue poem. This "twenty-page poetic sequence," Perloff points out, is not only a poem including history, but by having upstate New York's Lake George as its locale, "also a poem including geography" (*21st-Century Modernism* 164), as is, we might add, *Walden*, too. Perloff emphasizes the complex layering of the poem brought about by its collaging of the journal of William Johnson and Thoreau's *Ktaadn* and *Walden*, different speech registers, (mis)spellings, and proper names (166). The complexity of the allusions and the ambiguities evoke Eliot's strategy, were it not for the additional Khlebnikov-like *calligramme* technique, especially as it appears in the "non-linear visual criss-cross composition of the last few pages," with "clashing diagonal lines and spacing," and the "focus on the individual word or, more specifically, the morphemes within the word, and what Khlebnikov called the *letter as such*, both as sound and as visual element" (168).

By using actual documents, Howe grounds her poetry in history, while approaching the referential mode. However, referentiality gets diluted here, as Perloff notes, by the fragmentariness of the collaged text sometimes appearing "in shards and

fragments as if retrieved from a fire or flood," the ambiguous grammar, and the conspicuous deletion of first person reference (*Radical Artifice* 52).

A gendered counter-discourse to history was already launched in two early volumes already, *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* (1987) and *The Birth-mark* (1993), in which figures who had all but fallen through the cracks of history were given shelter in poetry. In the former she treats the conquest of the wilderness, both as *genitivus subjectivus* and *genitivus objectivus*, specifically Hope Atherton and Mary Rowlandson, both wanderers in the wilderness, natural and linguistic alike, whose encounter with the Other transformed them. In the latter, a collection of essays, she is following voices, she claims, that "lead [...] to the margins," voices that are "barely audible in the scanty second- or thirdhand records" (*The Birth-mark* 4). "Interested," as she puts it, "in getting women in that pantheon and keeping them there" ("Encloser" 193), she treats Rowlandson again, as well as Anne Hutchinson, and Emily Dickinson. Rowlandson, the author of "the first narrative written by an Anglo-American woman" (95), who has been "blamed for stereotypes of native Americans as 'savages'" (96), is presented in *The Birth-mark* as the person about whom critics perpetuated "an equally insulting stereotype," Howe insists, "that of a white woman as passive cipher in a controlled and circulated idea of Progress at whose zenith rides the hero-hunter (Indian or white) who will always rescue her" (96). Howe considers Hutchinson an "enthusiast" of both religion and language, citing Noah Webster's definition of the word *enthusiast* as "one whose imagination is warmed, one whose mind is highly excited with the love or in the pursuit of an object; a person of ardent zeal" (*The Birth-mark* 11). As an antinomian, as Caldwell points out, she posed "a threat to the very foundations of things," primarily with her passionate language; this was a language of rapture, full of "ambiguities and arbitrariness," challenging the rigid authoritarian discourse of Winthrop (359).

Howe's contributions to the critical reinterpretation of Dickinson constitute a special department within her gendered historical revisionist work, this time literary historical. Three publications are especially significant: the book-length poetic essay *My Emily Dickinson* (1985), the Dickinson chapter in *The Birth-mark* (1993), and the facsimile edition of Dickinson's envelope poems, *Gorgeous Nothings* (2003). With these poetically inspired critical pieces Howe reinstates Dickinson's "singularity," which gradually got "edited out" in later narratives ("Encloser" 191). Howe has contributed to a revisionist understanding of Dickinson by assigning significance to such aspects of poetry as her typographic eccentricities and her use of visuality as a signifying system operative on the physical surface of the pages.

In addition to Hutchinson, Rowlandson, and Dickinson, Howe granted central place to Stella, Cordelia, and Mary Magdalene, singular women again, whose "individual voice" "singularities" get "erased by factions" ("Encloser" 191). These women, who had been overshadowed by strong men, emerge here as representatives of some dark, wild, and unknowable Other, who had been pushed to the margins of history and literature for their foreign and untamable nature. This is the "liqui-dation process" Howe discusses in the first section of the collage poem *The Liber-ties* (1983), followed by the books devoted to Jonathan Swift's lifelong companion Stella (Esther Johnson) and Lear's daughter Cordelia. These are the women for whom "silence became self," to adopt the phrase she used in a discussion, and whom she urges to speak ("Silence becomes Self. Open your mouth"; "Encloser" 182). These are the figures whom she will "tenderly lift from the dark side of history, voices that are anonymous, slighted—inarticulate," as she puts it in the preface entitled "THERE ARE NOT LEAVES ENOUGH TO CROWN TO COVER TO CROWN TO COVER" (*The Europe of Trusts* 14).

The events of *Book of Stella* take place in Dublin's The Liberties section, where St. Patrick's Cathedral stands and where both Swift and Stella are interred, sharing one epitaph that makes no mention of the woman. Approaching the woman, Howe encounters the clock tower of the cathedral in the initial block poem, then moves further to the construction made of "irish granite" [sic] upon the "poddle" [sic] (*The Europe of Trusts* 159). The poet allows language to lead the lines, to apply Howe's phrase from an interview ("I would want my readers [...] to let language lead them"; [Kelley 31]), by such consonance as "cliff or cleft" and "purlieus wall perilous," as well as sound constant (as opposed to spelling difference) as "aisle or isle," alliter-ation as "walk" and "wall," and thesaurus-like word lists such as "head of tide poddle inlet pool." This obedience to language characterizes the whole poem, as do its shape reconstructions as well. In addition to the block poem recreating the tower in its typography, several of the subsequent pieces are also shape poems refashion-ing the initial S of Stella's name (161), the movement of the pendulum (163, 165), the lean figure of the young girl (166), and the hesitant broken speech of the woman dominated by a strong man. Howe recreates, in a fragmented voice, the story of the woman whose letters Swift burned after her death, now giving back her voice by citing Irish tales and legends. Freedom and voice are equally granted in the poem "light flickers in the rigging," rewriting, as Back observes, "a famous passage from an earlier Irish text" (74). But while borrowing the bird imagery from Irish myths, as Will Montgomery succinctly presents (7ff), Howe rids it of its metaphorical depth,

and uses it as physical image (giving some poems the shape of birds) and as a context to appropriate Swift's name and apply it to Stella in the line "known for the swiftness of her soul." Similarly, the pendulum image, describing the pull of Ireland and England for Swift, is now given shape in the subsequent lines of the poem and applied to Howe herself, who speaks in an interview of a "pull between countries," Ireland and the US, describing it as "a civil war in the soul" ("Falon interview" 37), which is very much in line with the Puritans' profound ambivalence towards selfhood, as often expressed in conversion narratives.

Turning from history to fiction in *Book of Cordelia*, Howe treats a woman known for her silence and passivity by placing the story in Irish mythology again and identifying King Lear with the Irish ocean God Lir, "whose children turned into swans" (172). This identification is rooted in the identity of sound again, confirming the validity of the knowledge contained by language. While indeed, as Stephen-Paul Martin puts it, the poet gives "a portrait of our repressed feminine awareness trapped in a patriarchal waste land (168), she assigns the power of language to Cordelia by the encouragement, "words are bullets" (178). Much like Stella, Cordelia is all language, made up of linguistic collusions as alliteration, assonance, consonance, and semantic associations, while also given shape in typographically meaningful poems such as the one taking the form of the initial C of her name (179). Indeed, in the words of Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Cordelia's "muted voice" is now heard (137), and it is heard exactly because of these linguistic techniques.

Female muteness remedied is the topic of the one act play, *God's Spies*, of *The Liberties* volume, with the title referring to the messengers Moses sent to spy out the land (Num. 13.17). This is the mission of Stella and Cordelia as well: to speak, in their own voices, of God's doings. The women become allies, developing a "relationship of mutual familiarity," as Back puts it, whereby they finish each other's sentences, as well as experience a "momentary merging into a single speaking subject" (91). Stella repeats what Cordelia said earlier (184/187), and sentences of earlier dialogues are now said by the two together (185/188). Given Swift's erasures of Stella's voice, the lines that have survived acquire a broader significance as they are reproduced in the text. Stella here is relegated to a humble schoolgirl reciting her two-page long paean, the poem written to Swift on his birthday in 1721, while Swift's Ghost keeps mouthing silently, in an effort to appropriate the authorship of Stella's text. It is no wonder, then, that Stella and Cordelia step out of this landscape, leaving behind "*Darkness. Silence. Gunshot. Silence*," as the last line of the play indicates. After this, in the final section of *The Liberties*, language breaks down, as

Douglas Barbour emphasizes, with "words scattered across the page in painterly blocks" (251). Words and letters take the shapes of *S*'s and *C*'s, or fragments of *S*'s and *C*'s, as well as block poems, in which female voices hide as if in the clock tower of a cathedral. Howe herself joins Stella and Cordelia, appearing as she is disappearing into language (disappearing into song, as in Mahler's "Ich Bin der Welt Abhanden Gekommen"), as the solution of the riddle of nine letters, to which the subsequent lines give no clue whatsoever. As George Butterick succinctly puts it, "it is Howe's remarkable ability to absent herself, to shed herself from her lines, that allows them to stand with such authority" (314). (I will discuss Howe's methods of absenting herself in detail later.)

Rough book poetry

I turn to the second form of *apocatastasis*, a mode of writing characterized by a disregard for normative grammar and typography, which I call rough book poetry or wilderness text.[4] Howe's poetry is known for its unusual language use and its equally unusual look on the page, derived from a return to a state before grammar and typography came to regulate the poetic text. In the *apocatastasis* spirit, the poet wishes to return to a poetic condition that precedes the state when words are drawn into sentences and lines are regulated into stanzas and block poems. Perception, ideas, and even perceived objects are presented in their rawness—much like in the rough book schoolchildren were at one time required to keep in which to store their thoughts as they were coming to them. A widely used schoolbook in England, the rough book is a most valuable document, recording thinking in its process and actuality. One would have notes and reminders in a rough book, thoughts taking the shape of mind maps, as well as half sentences or half lines jotted down before they were finished. Moreover, one would have memorabilia in a rough book as well, for example, photographs, ticket stubs, or pages from letters. The objects included in a rough book are not selected by any prior perspective; rather, the attention governing their inclusion is similar to William James's wandering attention,

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4   After completing this study, I noticed that Michael Davidson used a similar term for Howe's poetry, "notebook poetry," in the essay which I read over twenty-five years ago (and which I cite in this paper). But since "rough book poetry" emphasizes a crudeness and coarseness that has come to characterize some of Howe's poetry of the past decades since Davidson's chapter was first published in 1989, I decided to stick with the term that better suits my argument involving apocatastasis.

assigned to the genius and the child, who—as opposed to ordinary beings who see the world through selective attention (*Psychology* 37)—have the "faculty of perceiving in an unhabitual way" (195), via wandering attention (95). This is exactly what the rough book poetry of Howe presents: thoughts before they would be fitted into polished sentences; perceptions registered before they would "make sense" in a cultural matrix; lines running haphazardly as if in a mind map; and non-verbal objects as memorabilia. And, indeed, writing out of an interest in every document, document fragment, or seemingly irrelevant detail that comes the way of wandering attention.

As such, Howe's rough book reflects the wilderness condition of language, where words are still unregulated; a comparable state in language and nature precedes cultivation and taming, which constitutes one of the "crimes" the poet desires to uncover. This wilderness text is the theme of the volume *Secret History of the Dividing Line*, in which broken sentences, noun and verb phrase fragments, and unfinished words testify to the absence of language's colonizers (for example, in the poems beginning with "Numerous singularities," "Who / whitewashed epoch," and "green chaste"). As Butterick emphasizes, the poet "lives out on a frontier of the imagination, along with a family of thought in a wood of words" (319), which she desires to leave in its unorganized and heterogeneous state. The poem "Taking the Forest" explores the encounter between the wild forest and the settler, showing the forest to be stronger and the settler to be incapable of "taking" it. As sentences evolve into hesitant sentence fragments, left in half and begun again, with the same uncertainty and diffidence, the wood of words declares its refusal to be curtailed by grammar. The syntactic structures are fragmented, attributes are left off, the subjects are cut off from their predicates, indicating the irony of the situation: it is not the settler who takes the forest, but the other way round, the forest takes the settler.

In her earlier volumes, the preservation of old stories and words provides the primary means for retaining the seemingly disorganized discursive mass that later ages so easily threw out on the scrap-heap of history. This is what she calls the "wilderness of language," formed, as she puts it, "from old legends, precursor poems, archaic words, industrial and literary detritus" (*My Emily Dickinson* 70). Therefore—much like Olson, who insisted, as I quoted earlier, on using words with "the roots on, let them / dangle / And the dirt"—she will embrace a linguistic form of *apocatastasis*, by going back to a yet unregulated "original state." As she claims in "Writing *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*,"

During the 1980s I wanted to transplant words onto paper with soil sticking to their roots—to go to meet a narrative's fate by immediate access to its concrete totality of singular interjections, crucified spellings, abbreviations, irrational apprehensions, collective identities, palavers, kicks, cordials, comforts. I wanted jerky and tedious details to oratorically bloom and bear fruit as if they had been set at liberty or ransomed by angels. (201–2)

In this vein, Howe will write with great respect about those who, in the spirit of antinomianism, resisted the colonization of spirit and language, especially Dickinson, whose manuscript pages have been adjusted to the controlling norms of publishing, whereby a very meaningful sign system came to be extinguished in her text. Learning from Dickinson's injuries, Howe retains her poems as broken, fragmented, stuttering. For stutter is meaningful; as she claims in the *Talisman* interview, "It's the stutter in American literature that interests me. I hear the stutter as a sounding of uncertainty. What is silenced or not quite silenced. All the broken dreams" (*The Birth-mark* 180–81).

Howe's poetry is permeated by this antinomian spirit in both its language and look; the colonizers of grammar and typography have been evicted, the discourse liberated. The typical method of this eviction can be described by the marking, in the Jakobsonian sense, of these two traditionally unmarked aspects of the text, normative grammar and conventional verse lineation. Howe subverts both of these sign systems, making visible what was earlier invisible. Meaning evolves not through the transparent medium of language and the equally transparent convention of typography, but within grammar and visual composition taking the foreground for meanings to show themselves. Subverting the rules of grammar and typography offers a way to take away the transparency of language and turning it into a visible medium. Bernstein calls these visibility spots "typographicities" and "syntaxophonies" (*Content's Dream* 73), as if lumps in wood, places where the material thickens. Everything that is unusual or irregular counts as a lump, making language visible, and depriving it of its medial transparency.

Resisting the normative control of grammar has a long tradition in American poetry, going back to Dickinson and running through the whole succession of avant-gardes of the past one hundred plus years. As I mentioned earlier, Howe identified it as "detritus" in Dickinson (*My Emily Dickinson* 70), coming in the form of fractured discourse, as she puts it elsewhere,

a stammering even. Interruption and hesitation used as a force. A recognition that there is an other voice, an attempt to hear and speak it. It's this brokenness that interests me. ("Encloser" 192)

Pound, Stein, Spicer, Olson, Duncan, Bernstein, and Howe, to mention only a few names, have all experimented with creating, out of broken sentences, this sense of fracturing and stammering. As deviations from normative grammar, they will act as lumps in the material of language, defamiliarizing it, making it strange, in the spirit of the Russian Formalists, so that whatever was invisible or unnoticed now becomes visible and noticed.

Much like Mary Magdalene, who submits and subjects to the power of the Word,

It is the Word to whom she turns
True submission and subjection
(*The Nonconformist's Memorial* 30)

Howe submits to language, allowing language to lead her. The linguistic compass that she allows herself to be directed by is made up of linguistic anomalies. Some of her favorite anomalies are the following: misspellings and typos (*castl* [*Defenestration of Prague* 91], *forgotn, forgetng* [*Debths* 41, 61]); archaic looking spellings (*wilde, realme, inhabitinge, afterwarde,* and *stretching*; *The Europe of Trusts* 94); thesaurus-like semantic lists ("pasture paradise park," roe buck and wild boar" [*Frame Structures* 46]; "Ceramic, plaster, laquer, newspaper" [*Debths* 28]; "metal, clay, gauche, glass, glue" [*Debths* 30]);lists of words associated by sound ("thimble thumb," "rugged raggedy," "puppet pattern," "clock lock" [*Debths* 107, 109, 120]); association of commonplaces, proverbs, and other sayings ("Let's let bygones be bygones," "Dust to dust," "to make a / long story short," "knock on wood," [*Debths* 111, 115–16]); writing separate words as one ("blanksmiling" [*Frame Structures* 53], "Woodslippercounterclatter" [*Debths* 111]). All of these anomalies serve to uncover the knowledge stored in language, and then conveyed by overwhelmingly accidental coincidences convey. The one non-accidental route to knowledge is etymology: it is by a reliance on the etymology of words that historical knowledge stored in words can be brought to the surface. As Butterick points out,

etymology […] is her true genealogy. Howe favors etymologies in her work perhaps as much as feelings. She instinctively seeks to possess language to its

roots, pre-family, pre-historical, even before language semanticizes itself. (Butterick 314)

As a linguistic version of Howe's interest in origins, etymologies will take the poet to an earlier linguistic state that has not been determined by cultural patterns or cognitive paradigms. Interrogated by the poet through puns, non sequiturs, homonyms, and typos, language will yield meanings that cannot be found in polished sentences.

Howe does not accept an authority that has the power to determine what is right and what is wrong in language, making her kinship with two major women predecessors, Dickinson and Stein, unmistakable. For refusing that any person or principle would have the right to legislate over language, Dickinson and Stein similarly disregarded the rules of syntax and morphology, insisting to uncover a different kind of knowledge in an uncontrolled language. It is this normative controlling principle Howe questions in connection with Dickinson, asking,

> Who polices questions of grammar, parts of speech, connection, and connotation? Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence? What inner articulation releases the coils and complications of Saying's assertion? (*My Emily Dickinson* 11–12)

Knowledge stored in language and meanings that lie beneath the regulating grid of grammar can only be brought to the surface by using an unregulated language. Not only is it impossible to tell such knowledges and meanings in grammatical sentences, but even to think them. And the poet who wishes to say the unsayable must have recourse to a different language. As Ming Qian puts it,

> To articulate the inarticulate, Howe's poetic praxis pivots on a lyric consciousness upon which impinges a double mission of rescuing and breaking free: rescuing the "stutter" that Howe hears in American literature. ("Articulating the Inarticulate" 469)

The stutter coming about by the articulation of the inarticulate characterizes the speech of Mary Magdalene in *The Nonconformist's Memorial* (1993). In the passionate testimony of this "love-impelled figure," "Thought was broken down," "Translat[ing] the secret / in lair idiom havoc" (*The Nonconformist's Memorial* 17). Her acts

are described in a similarly passionate language, in broken sentences punctuated by unconnected verb or noun phrases only.

> Came saw went running told
> Came along
> Solution continuous chaos
> Asked told observed
> Caught sight of said said
> (*The Nonconformist's Memorial* 12)

In this manner, Howe will allow ample room for the reader to enter the field of language to "make sense" of the indeterminacy embedded in the "stutter"—broken sentences, non sequiturs, homonym homonyms, misspellings, typos, puns, and other linguistic anomalies that bring about, as Quartermain points out, "polyvalent clusters of associations" abandoning not only normative syntax, but "even intelligibility" (19).

Howe has developed a fine visual prosodic system relying on both sound and sight by using a diverse regimen of lineation from the more traditional stanzas (or stanza looking units) to lines running in all directions all the way to incorporating non-verbal materials into poetry. I will discuss these three modes of visual prosody below.

It is in *Pythagorean Silence* (1982) that Howe develops and brings to perfection her staple typographic practice within the more traditional lineation mode, informed by the simultaneity of a strong caesura and a strong enjambment. In the overwhelming majority of the poems one can find this counterpointing non-coincidence of grammatical break and line break, creating an eerie sense of syncopation, with grammar and typography struggling to take control. I have in mind lines like the following, in which, after a strong caesura, the last word of the line begins a new sentence or phrase that continues in the subsequent line.

> power of vision a vast
> zero
> (*The Europe of Trusts* 31)

> Only the first of fame passing degrees
> of wilderness
> (*The Europe of Trusts* 32)

a sentence or character
suddenly

steps out to seek for truth fails
falls

into a stream of ink Sequence
trails off
(*The Europe of Trusts* 36)

cataclysmic Pythagoras Things
not as they are

for they are not but as they seem
(as mirror

in mirror to be)
(*The Europe of Trusts* 38)

In all these lines we encounter the wrestling of two forces, grammar and typography: grammar refuses to yield to typography, while typography refuses to yield to grammar, together creating a voice that seems rushing and rushed, driven by the push of the next grammatical or typographic unit, never coming to a resting point, always out of breath.

Howe subverts the horizontal-vertical grid that has been taken for granted in writing. Such subversions have become the most striking marks of Howe's poetry, consisting in the radicalization of typographic layout conventions. Typographical experimentation begins in the volume *Hinge Picture* (1974) already—with words dropped from sentences and sentences getting chopped up, morphological units losing letters or getting randomly cut in half, all for the sake of typographic idiosyncrasies (see, for example, *Frame Structures* 41, 43, 44, 47, 48, 49)—as well as in *Secret History of the Dividing Line* with its mirroring techniques.

While we have regular stanzaic units in *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time* in *Singularities*, in *Thorow* of the same volume lines begin to run in all directions, as the wilderness within breaks language boundaries. There is no one way to hold the

page—in fact, in order to read the text, the reader must turn it all around, as if walking around a sculpture to fully take it in.

In *The Nonconformist's Memorial* lineation either reflects the events in an iconic way, when, for example, lines form the cross of "Effectual crucifying knowledge" (*The Nonconformist's Memorial* 8), or start ascending to heaven (9), when line spacing varies (11), or when lines push themselves in between other lines (16). We have a similarly unconventional lineation in *Eikon Basilike* (1989), with sections from the documents of the court trial of King Charles I, his own book, and other historical records, with lines—some crossed out, others deleted—running in all directions, capturing, in one visual space, the fiery passions preparing for the impending regicide. The page is at once a visual and linguistic field of force, in which the semantics of the words is multiplied by their visual meanings.

Likewise, we find a complex signification coming about from the interaction of visual and semantic meanings in *The Liberties* (1983). In both the *Book of Stella* and the *Book of Cordelia* we have shape poems performing the initials of Stella and Cordelia, alternating with long, fragile poems made up of just one phrase, one word, or even part of a word to reenact a hesitant, broken language, associative and hallucinatory rather than logical, following the process of the two women coming to speech. Kathleen Fraser sees the realization of Olson's "graphic 'signatures'" (177) here, the visual techniques underlining the silences and voids surrounding the two women, emphasizing especially Stella's "voice in hiding—a literal cry of isolation—choked off, reduced to encoded speech" (188).

As a poet who began her career as a visual artist, Howe has developed a particular sensitivity of what her pages should look like, attentive of the signifying role of the visual interplay of between white space and letters, words, and lines. "In the precinct of Poetry, a word, the space around a word, each letter, every mark, silence or sound volatilizes an inner law of form," she writes (*Birth-mark* 145). Her early installations came about from the combination of linguistic materials and photographs; these combinations remained a staple feature of her poetry as well, with innovations consisting exactly in the incorporation of the image of physical objects in the language material.

Treating the printed page as a physical space provides yet another link to the Olson tradition. Howe acknowledges her debt to Olson with regard to composing on the page in an essay written in 1987, emphasizing the predecessor's "spatial expressiveness," his "feeling for seeing," his treating the page as if it were a canvas.

The spatial expressiveness of Olson's writing is seldom emphasized enough. [...] This feeling for seeing in a poem, is Olson's innovation. [...] At his best, Olson lets words and groups of words, even letter arrangements and spelling accidentals shoot suggestions at each other, as if each page were a canvas and the motion of words—reality across surface. Optical effects, seemingly chance encounters of letters, are a bridge. Through a screen of juxtaposition one dynamic image may be visible. [...] In Olson's poetic diapason, space sounds motion, signs speak vision, and rhythm reads back archaic cries. (*The Quarry* 186–200)

Indeed, refusing to limit the printed page to meaningful verbal clusters (meaningful and verbal only), Howe embraces the mode of writing defined by Olson in the "Projective Verse" essay as "OPEN verse" (15) and "composition by field" (16) or "field composition (16), allowing the poet to follow the track "the poem under hand declares" (16). This poem will neither be referential to reality, nor allow itself to convey ideas framed by linguistic and cognitive paradigms; instead, it registers an earlier state of seeing and thinking, the state, to quote Butterick again, "before language semanticizes itself" (314).

In such a way, not only will verbal units be meaningful but also the white spaces will contribute to the complex of the "field" of the poem, together creating what Olson calls the "kinetic of the poem" (243). What's more—and here comes a further innovation radicalizing the innovative spirit of Olson's poetics—Howe allows the inclusion of purely visual materials in the text. Among these inclusions we could mention the photocopy of the front page of her New Directions *Eikon Basilike* as superimposed upon Charles I's *The King's Book or Eikon Basilike* (in *Eikon Basilike*); the manuscript pages from Charles Sanders Peirce's "Prescott Book" (in *Pierce-Arrow*); the tissue interleaf between the frontispiece and title page of Stevenson's *The Master of Ballantrae* (in *The Midnight*); family photographs, such as the daguerreotype of the "four Josiah Quincys" as it appeared on Helen Howe's book cover (in *Chanting at the Crystal Sea*) and the picture of John Manning, and the Irish stamp issued in honor of the suffragette Aunt Louis Bennett (in *The Midnight*). The layering technique used in these volumes incorporating non-verbal materials into language segments employs, as Mandy Bloomfield correctly points out, what Michael Davidson calls "palimtext," retaining the materiality of the text among the layers of the poem (670). According to Davidson,

palimtext is neither a genre nor an object, but a writing-in-process that may make use of any number of textual sources. As its name implies the palimtext retains vestiges of prior writings out of which it emerges. (78)

Howe has perfected this method of "found language" described in connection of George Oppen by Davidson, showing not just "vestiges of prior writings," multiplying the layers by incorporating images of non-verbal documents, such that have themselves incorporated earlier documents. We can find such a multiplication in *The Midnight* (2003), for example, where the image of a Yeats poem shows only lines that are not covered by a bookmark, a worn copy of a Stevenson novel is scribbled over by the brother, and the great aunt's songbook contains etchings done by a youngster decades later.

The latest volumes employ a mixture of visual prosodic techniques. *Pierce-Arrow* (1999), for example, contains loose sonnets in *Rückenfigur*, next to the radical mixture of verbal and non-verbal materials in other parts. This technique is followed in the latest volume, *Debths* (2017), in which the four sections alternate using more conventional and more radical visual typographies. "Titian Air Vent" contains verses written in blocks verging on stanzas and "Periscope" five to eight line stanzas, while "Tom Tit Tot" and "Debths" takes visual typography to the extreme, with typos verging on the unintelligible, font types and sizes changing, foreign texts or parts thereof appear photocopied, serving as the deeper layers of the palimtexts.

Withdrawal of the self

The last feature of Howe's poetry that I discuss consists in the particular manner of handling autobiographical or other personal themes. On the one hand, even when writing poems informed by the most personal topics—such as narratives dealing with family history or the long elegiac poem occasioned by her husband's death— the voice is never confessional, not even personal. On the other, although the poems are not written directly from the position of the speaking subject, this subject is still present as the underlying constant of thematic attention. Denying, as Perloff insists, "the very possibilities of the expressivity one wants from lyric," Howe is constantly shifting perspectives, and the subject, "far from being at the center of discourse," is "located only at its interstices" ("Language Poetry" 426, 432). Thus the

dimension of the personal is repeatedly overwritten by the curbing of the lyric subject, the withdrawal of the self from the poem.

This radical reinterpretation of the role of the lyrical subject is yet another thread that ties Howe to Olson's innovative poetics, in particular to the "stance towards reality" he calls "objectism" in the "Projective Verse" essay.

> Objectism is the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which Western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature (with certain instructions to carry out) and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects. For a man is himself an object, whatever he may take to be his advantages [...]. (24)

Of the two meanings of objectism—"a stance toward reality outside the poem" and a "stance toward the reality of a poem itself" (24)—it is the latter that concerns the role of the lyrical subject, "the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego." In line with Olson, Howe disregards the lyric subject as central perspective and organizing potential, demanding an alternative creative process informed by an attention to the world and language. As such, Howe's poetic discourse is not centered in the lyric I, nor is it self-expressive in the sense of expressing a self preexisting the poetic utterance. Rather, the subject, moved from the center of discourse to its "interstices," to cite Perloff again ("Language Poetry" 432), develops in discourse, as a construct of the discourse in the making, bringing about the authority of the impersonal.

I detect two modes whereby Howe has withdrawn the lyric self in poems with a personal or autobiographical focus, opting instead on an attention to the world and discourse: the reversal of topic-comment relations and the planting of a discursive filter. I begin with the former.

Howe has introduced a particular method for satisfying the Olsonian demand for "getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego" when reversing the topic-comment relations that characterize confessional or otherwise subjective poetry. Here it is not the I, the self that serves as the topic of the poetic enunciation about which certain personal predications are formulated, but rather the events and characters of the world outside, whether of family or history. Put simply, it is not the poet but these events and characters that take center stage in the stories; the poet herself will only appear—if only by way of their family or local ties—in the

comment part. This reversal of topic-comment relations explains why we have so very few first person narrators in Howe's poetry, and why, when the first person grammatical subject does occur, it does not coincide with the speaker but refers to a person in the comment part.

The prose collage sections of *Frame Structures* (1966) offer an illuminative example for topic-comment reversal, with the placement of the subject into the comment part. Here the poet presents her childhood through stories of her ancestors. For example, Fanny Appleton's little blue parasol provides the occasion (the topic) for telling about the American grandfather, grandmother Fanny Quincy, and the Quincy great-grandparents' summer house she visited as a child (14). Here the parasol and the Quincy family serve as topic, while the summer visits as comments involving the child. Or, to take another example, instead of the usual biographical presentation of the ancestors, Howe writes about her grandfather via the topic of the antiquarian movement (17–18) and about her father via the topic of the "hot dogs" of Felix Frankfurter of Harvard Law School, who went on to establish together the Law School at Buffalo. In each case it is the historical facts that provide the topic part of the enunciation, into whose comment part the narrating I is embedded, thereby eliminating the confessionalism of self-centered narrative.

The poetic presentation of family history thus takes the focus of local history, making visible the ways historical processes are intertwined with personal lives. In this vein, the long poem "Pearl Harbor" uses the historical event as topic to narrate how the child felt when her father had been drafted. The personal loss embedded in the comment part is tied to a larger topic independent of the Self, such as the themes of a parent cut off from child, the child's experience of the parent's absence, the pain and mourning felt after losing a loved one, and the sense of void and irreplaceability felt after the death of a loved one.

Similarly, it is 20th century cultural history that serves as the topic for presenting, in the comment part of the poetic utterance, the life of the Irish mother in *The Midnight*. The complex elegy written after Mary Manning's death is centered on the childhood readings of the girl growing up in early 20th century Dublin. Here the physical copies become parts of the text, among them the books of Lewis Carroll and W. B. Yeats, sections from the critical commentaries written about the performances of the Dublin actress, and pages taken from the poems and letters of Yeats, the mother's favorite poet. All these details enter into an actual physical dialogue with each other in what Howe calls the "relational space" of the text, "the thing that's alive with something from somewhere else," as she writes (*The Midnight* 58).

Such relational space comes about not only between the mother and her Irish past, but also between the person remembered and the one doing the remembering, that is, mother and daughter. This daughter will now foreground, within the comment part, the mother's figure through those lines of a Yeats poem, for example, that are not covered by Mary's bookmarks, thereby reversing back the formerly reversed topic-comment relations (78). Perloff identifies the "cold" writing mode practiced by Yeats in *The Autobiographies* in this approach to a person in *The Midnight* (*Unoriginal Genius* 114). This mode agrees, I believe, with the family historiography brought about by the withdrawal of the self; when even the autobiographical works lack a continuous narrative, it is only language, the linguistic surface that remains constant.

In this volume Howe uses another method as well for the withdrawing the Self: she lets down a curtain of sorts, made of cultural narratives, which serves as a filter through which the experience of the subject can be observed. I call this curtain a discursive filter, allowing the Self to encounter, recognize, and interpret the experience, while at the same time preventing the experiencing Self from the self-revelation and self-pity of confessional poetry.

The discursive filter is a method Howe has used recurrently for over twenty years, whether writing through the mother's childhood readings or the *Rückenfigur* made famous by Caspar David Friedrich, or adopting the language play in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* And although the term "discursive filter" is a metaphor (prompted by the title *Bed Hangings*), the method itself is not metaphorical: the filter or curtain or "bed hanging" does not stand *for* the experience as an interpretive grid, but rather *before* it, allowing the events to be viewed *through* its narrative (somewhat like Perloff describes the "writing through" method of Cage in *Poetry On and Off the Page*). And although the self-reflexive grammatical I is still not present in Howe's poetry, nor do the poems "express" emotional and mental states, they do serve, as Perloff puts it, a "complex process of negotiation" between private feelings and public evidence (*Unoriginal Genius* 101). According to the paraphrase Perloff has given to the assumed self-image of the poet, the self is merely understood to be a link in a cultural matrix: "I m not only what my subconscious tells me but a link—an unwitting one, perhaps—in a cultural matrix" (101).

Here the method of discursive filter meets Howe's rough book poetry technique. For not only do childhood readings provide links in the cultural matrix of *The Midnight*, but also other prose documents and visual images that are present as material objects; these are, as Perloff lists them, old family photographs, maps,

reproductions of paintings, catalogues, tissue interleaves (*Unoriginal Genius* 99–100). As such, the transparency of language is repeatedly blocked by the visual images retained in their full materiality, still "filtering," so to speak, cultural experience, allowing subjective experiences to run through and between them towards clarification—somewhat in a way pebbles halt the water rushing through, while getting cleansed by it. These are the documents both halting and filtering the experience of the poet who insistently claims that she "work[s] in the poetic documentary form" (*Quarry* 94). The volume *The Midnight*, produced, as Howe puts it, by "scissor work" (60), brings about its complex relational space through the inclusion of multiple discursive and material filters negotiating between public and private. Such negotiation occurs, for example, when the (private) inscription written in Aunt Louis Bennett's (public) 1895 *Irish Songbook* is marked by a (private) duct tape mending the broken spine and a (private) drawing, a stick figure sketched by a later generation of "some anonymous American preschooler" (60), most probably one of Howe's children.

The serial elegy *Rückenfigur*, written upon the death of David von Schlegell, Howe's husband, and published in the volume *Pierce-Arrow*, is a supreme example of how a cultural discourse acts as a filter for private experience. While the emotional tone of the whole poem stems from the experience of loss and the feeling of grief felt over loss, this experience and feeling are not presented as subjective but from a distance, as parts of the image the wanderer sees when turning his back to us. The Rückenfigur was a familiar feature of 19th century German landscape painting, made widely known by Caspar David Friedrich's *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (*The Wanderer above the Mists*, 1818). The Rückenfigur is the observer, who, although standing outside of the scene he looks at, is from our perspective part of it, allowing us viewers to see through his eyes. What we see in the poem is the past, showing its back to us, while the past presents itself as the landscape held by the gaze of the Rückenfigur. As Nicholls succinctly claims, "the past has, as it were, its back turned towards us" ("The Pastness of Landscape" 457), with the Rückenfigur providing perspective for act of remembering and the space-time evoked, making the piece, as Perloff aptly puts it on the dust jacket of the New Directions paperback edition, "a profound memory poem."

Howe's poetic sequence of short, fourteen-line poems, deals with the intense feelings of love, separation, loss, and pain, presenting the private experience through the common cultural knowledge reflected in the narrative of Tristan and Iseult, Orpheus and Eurydice, Theseus and Aegeus, Antigone and Polyneices, as well as

Hamlet and Ophelia. This means that the discursive filter provided by the Rücken-figur, further increased by these classic narratives, turns the personal into public and cultural. Implicitly summoning the "lyrist" Orpheus and acknowledging the futility of his turning back in the final poem, "Day binds the wide Sound," the speaker seeks to come to terms with the "retreating" of the loved one by *theomimesis*, or the attempt to acquire God's point of view when accepting death. Although the fourteen-line verse form recalls the classic sonnet, the dominant mode of love lyric since the renaissance, this mode gets simultaneously resisted by the short lines of varying length (six to eight syllables), the vague referentiality of the lyric I, and most emphatically by the broken syntax made up of sentence fragments and words detached from their contexts. Nicholls draws attention to the "jammed, verbless line[s]," the "subjectless verb[s]," the "abrupt internal divisions that pit emphatic caesuras against the forward drive of enjambment" ("The Pastness of Landscape" 457). That is, we have two opposing forces at work in the poem: on the one hand, a most intense elegiac voice evoking the theme of death and loss in their many contexts, and on the other a recurrent flattening of the lyric attained by a dismembered language. As Montgomery aptly puts it, "[t]he lyric potentialities of *Rückenfigur* repeatedly fold into an implicit questioning of lyric as a mask for the tyrannous imperatives of desire" (152), citing Howe's own reflections from the poem, "Assuredly I see division" and "Two thoughts in strife" (*Pierce-Arrow* 134–35).

Howe's latest volume, *Debths* uses a discursive filter already in its title. *Debths* is not an existing word but a linguistic anomaly coined by Joyce in *Finnegans Wake*, evoking three English words simultaneously: *debts*, *depths*, and *deaths.* One of Howe's "sparkling *trouvailles*," as Dan Chiasson puts it, "the pun suggests the 'debts' Howe owes to her ancestors and their works, the 'depths' of her engagement with material traces of ideas […], and the 'deaths' of parents and loved ones that have shaped Howe's elegiac intensities." A "hybrid animal," Chiasson continues, the book is a "composite of autobiographical prose, minimalist verse, collaged (and mainly illegible) clippings of old texts, and lots of white space," as well as the fragments of installations produced by two visual artists, Isabella Stewart Gardner and Paul Thek. Everything has a meaning repeatedly modified by context in this echo chamber of discursive filters, since all these cultural shreds enter into an intensive physical dialogue with each other as well as the surrounding white spaces.

*

I have examined three features of Susan Howe's poetry that contribute to the singularity of her poetry: her overriding interest in history, her unregulated grammar and typography, and her practice of absenting herself from the work. These innovations tie her poetry to the succession of avant-gardes running through the past one hundred plus years, in particular to what she terms as the "undervoice" in American poetry. Of these undervoices, Charles Olson seems to have exerted a most enduring influence on Howe's writing, as the contexts of the three features discussed above testify. Howe's revisionist reconstruction of history and her disregard for both grammatical and typographic conventions can be best understood within the context of Olson's idea of *apocatastasis*, or the reconstitution of an original state in history, thought, and writing. The practice of withdrawing the self also has its ties to Olson, in particular to his objectist stance towards reality, which aims at "the getting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego." Although Howe often treats personal topics, she does so without being subjective or confessional; instead she hides the subjective in the comment part of the utterance or distances it behind a cultural narrative.

Two passages quoted earlier may stand side by side for how similarly the two poets considered this urge to capture early moments in the processes of apperception, before perceptions "make sense" and are fitted into polished sentences and regular looking pages. First, from Charles Olson's "These days":

> These days
> whatever you have to say, leave
> the roots on, let them
> dangle
>
> And the dirt
>
> > just to make clear
> > where they come from.

And from Howe's "Writing *Articulation of Sound Forms in Time*": "I wanted to transplant words onto paper with soil sticking to their roots" (201). Indeed, Howe does just that: writes in a wilderness language reflecting the state preceding the "crime" of colonization by grammar and typography. By disregarding the rules of grammar, the poet can better listen to language and unearth knowledge stored

beneath the regulating grid of grammar. By the same token, by disregarding the conventions of typography, the poet has a better chance to come to new realizations produced by the unexpected meetings of lines, discharged by never-before crossings and overlappings on the canvas of the poem. Howe's rough book poetry will then allow her—in the spirit of Goethe, Rimbaud, as well as Olson— to write about about what she does not know.

It is no wonder, then, that Howe's poetry demands a very different involvement by the reader: one has to comply with her invitation to participate in the creative process. Indeed, in this poetry, as in Bernstein's "imploded sentences," the reader "stays plugged in to the wave-like pulse of the writing" (*Artifice of Absorption*). The reader must resist the search for the lyrical I, as well as some supposedly deeper meaning in poetry. The reader must strip the reading process of the old imperative to make meaning, tolerating not knowing and not understanding. Finally, the reader must learn to disregard referential meaning and recognize instead the voices produced by the visual rhythm of the letters and words.

Howe treats her readers as grown-ups, or "full citizen[s] of the textual terrain," as Back puts it, "with equal rights and obligations in the making of meaning" (6). Moreover, she offers her readers the experience of play and of the encounter with language as a powerful force. As she says in an interview, "I would want my readers to play, to enter the mystery of language, and to follow words where they lead, to let language lead them" (Kelley 31). Ultimately, such submitting to play and language will turn Susan Howe's poetry into a true *texte du plaisir*.

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INDEX

This collection brings together critical studies framed by several theoretical perspectives, including performative, intersubjective, postmodern, feminist, tropological, and rhetorical. The prose texts have been selected in such a way that they are best interpreted through these theoretical approaches. Specifically, they turn on processes whereby the (gendered) subjects are performatively constructed, while characters, often informed by rhetorical processes and structures, are formed via their interactions with others. The poetic texts are interpreted within the frames of poetological paradigms that problematize referentiality, self-expressivity, and performativity.

The approach of "reading through theory" might be called ekphrastic, where theory acts as a filter through which we read literature. Theory is put in the service of interpretation, while its use or usefulness is also tested in the process of critical reading. In other words, not only does the text demand the theory, but also the theory demands the text.

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